Phone : 2139

THE SHORT STORY

Edited by MANJERI S. ISVARAN

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CONTENTS

		Page
Editorial	The Whispering Gallery	529
M. Chalapathi Rau	Death of Midas	531
Manjeri S. Isvaran	The Kolu	537
"Wayfarer"	A Mixed Bag	540
P. G. Sundararajan	Beauty is Truth	541
Navagar	The Passion Play	549
M. N. Subramaniam	O Father—Thy Son!	556
Ilangovan	Confession	559
A. Ramiah	Poor Brahma	563
U. S. Ramachandran	Craven	564
	India in English Fiction	568
	In the Book World	569

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The WHISPERING GALLERY of LIFE & LETTERS

(This section is devoted to Editorial Comments on current topics of interest)

> The truly great
> Have all one age, and from one visible place
> Shed influence. They, both in power and act,
> Are permanent, and Time is not with them,
> Save as it worketh for them, they in it.—
>
> COLERIDGE

> It is in the highest degree unphilosophic to call language or diction the dress of our thoughts . . . It is the incarnation of our thoughts.—
>
> WORDSWORTH

The Newdigate Prize

MR A. W. PLOWMAN, undergraduate of the Oxford University has been awarded the 1935 Newdigate Prize. The theme he selected was " Canterbury."

It would be interesting to know the origin of this famous verse award.

Sir Roger Newdigate, English antiquary fifth baronet of Harefield, Middlesex and Arbury, Warwickshire was born on May 30, 1719. He matriculated at University College, Oxford, on April 9, 1736, was created M. A. on May 16, 1738, and became D.C.L. in April 1749. From 1741 to 1747 he was M. P. for Middlesex and from 1750 to 1780 (when he retired) was M. P. for the University of Oxford. He was a high tory, and Horace Walpole in 1767 calls him 'a half-converted Jacobite.' He took a practical interest in the extension of canals and roads, and was a student of ancient architecture. During a tour early in life in France and Italy he made sketches of ancient buildings, filling two folio volumes preserved in his Library at Arbury. He collected ancient marbles, casts of statues, and also vases, some of which were engraved by Piranesi. He died in 1806, in his eighty-seventh year, and is chiefly remembered as the donor of the Newdigate prize at Oxford University which is of the annual value of twenty-one guineas, and is confined to undergraduates. It was first awarded in 1806, and in accordance with Newdigate's desire the competing compositions were originally restricted to fifty lines and to some subject connected with the history of ancient sculpture, painting, or architecture; the poems were not to contain any compliment to Newdigate himself (*Dictionary of National Biography*). 'It was not,' writes a correspondent in *The Observer*, 'until these two restrictions (the length and the subject) were removed by the consent of his heirs that his prize became interesting and important. The "elegant composition," as he called it,

of the prize-winner who subsequenty made a name for himself as "Christopher North," was the only one of the prize poems which he lived to read.' Tennyson, Ruskin, Arnold, Wilde are some of the illustrious names in the list of winners.

Karel Capek

AT the meeting of the International P. E. N. Club held recently in Barcelona, Mr H. G. Wells, the present President of the Club has proposed the name of Karel Capek as his successor. Mr Capek, the Czech, is a writer of international reputation; his novel *Hordubal* published by Messrs Allen and Unwin (translated by Mr and Mrs Weatherall) has been received by the English reading public as a masterpiece in fiction. He is also a traveller, humorist, and biographer. His biography of President Masaryk, of Czecho-Slovakia, (*President Masaryk Tells His Story*) deals with the life and philosophy of the peasant who became President. It is intimate and sensitive in that it took shape out of a series of conversations he had with Masaryk.

A Kipling Find

A HITHERTO unpublished verse which Mr Rudyard Kipling wrote in 1928 when he was on holiday in the Mediterranean, intended to be placed on the Cenotaph at Sudbury, Ontario, has come to light. Unfortunately it arrived after the plaque had been cast. The verse consists of four typically Kipling lines, which are given below:—

We, giving all, gained all.
Neither lament us nor praise;
Only, in all things recall,
It is fear, not death, that slays.

(*The Kipling Journal*)

The King's Medal for Poetry

FOR his volume of verse, *Four Walls*, published last year, Mr Laurence Whistler has been awarded a gold medal, the gift of H. M. the King. Poet Laureate, Mr John Masefield, who made the presentation, highly praised the work of Mr Whistler who is still under twenty-five.

"The Seven Pillars of Wisdom"

MESSRS CAPE are publishing shortly the late Colonel T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, unabridged and at the price of £1 10s. Mr F. Yeats-Brown in the course of an article in *The Spectator* on Lawrence mentions about his unpublished work, *The Mint*, which he read in manuscript. 'Both books,' he writes, 'contain passages as well-balanced, tense, virile, evocative as any in the English language. . . They are the products of a fine brain under tremendous nervous tension, strained and half-starved as his body then was. They will live, because they are symbolical of the grandeur and misery of his time and because through them and in them shines the greatness of the man.' This tribute makes one eager for the publication of *The Mint* also.

A Play Abandoned

MISS NANCY PRICE, Hon Director of the People's Theatre, had to abandon *Rossetti*, a play on the poet-painter's life owing to certain objections from Mr Geoffrey Rossetti, grandson of Rossetti's brother, William. The play was written by R. L. Megroz in collaboration with Mr Herbert du Hamel. This brings to mind the objection raised against the production of Rudolf Besier's play, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, by some of the descendants of the Barretts. The objection, subsequently, was withdrawn.

DEATH OF MIDAS

By M. CHALAPATHI RAU

MAJOR SIR GOGENDRANATH SURYABHANSINGH BAHADUR, G.B.E., Maharajah of Godrejpur, received with more than due solemnities Col Pimpernel, D. S. O., M. C., Political Agent, and Mrs Pimpernel, his wife, who as Evelyn Dumbell had been hailed as the most beautiful debutante of the season before the War. It was but natural that Mrs Pimpernel, even in her fortieth year, should keep her coral lips fresh and unimpaired, her flesh fragrant, her Diana-hips slim and beguiling. She wore a plain gown of pale nameless flowers which crept and overflowed and revealed only a quarter of her nakedness.

It was enough for the Maharajah. He trembled at her aspen beauty, her locks frizzling off in forelocks a trifle divinely under her green hat, and the pearls playing guiltily on her sapless bosom. The tiny fox-terrier, which exhibited all the humility of St Francis, lay lapped on her, and emphasised her bold and beautiful curves.

Her cheeks fluttered like red ensigns captured in war. Which means that Mrs Pimpernel in her fortieth year could blush like a debutante.

The coach moved on at a trotting pace. The crowds cheered the green hat. The Maharajah was sitting opposite her, with his glittering turban which sparkled under the cool shade of the umbrella, in his shining coat, silkiest of silk fabrics, red and blue, blue and red, purplish and sun-proof, two hundred pounds of polygamous flesh in all its pride and ancestry.

Mrs Pimpernel's gaze wandered for a while; it rested on his brilliant buttons; it mounted up to his eager chin; it cajoled his legs; it played on his restless hands; it wandered for a little while more, and dived into his two hundred pounds of flesh and lay there aimless among his coils.

His gaze was more purposeful. It rested on her glamorous eyes; it waylaid her sharp looks; it covered her unyielding bosom; it measured her girth; it guessed at her weight, and lay dreaming about her bone and marrow.

It was a sight for the gods of Godrejpur when Mrs Pimpernel pirouetted down the coach with her huge green hat and her unforgettable smile.

§

On the next morning, Sir Gogendranath was celebrating the Silver Jubilee of his installation. There was a panoplied array of howdahed elephants, caparisoned steeds, and neighbouring Rajahs bedecked in all available stones. From the Old Palace, behind the Agent's quarters, started the pageant going in a slow procession of music and fireworks, to the New Palace, which the Maharajah had built in a neo-Parisian style at a cost of twenty lakhs.

Mrs Pimpernel sat by the side of the Maharajah in his gold and silver coach, puzzled at his monumental baroqueness, and now and then smiling faintly in answer to the cheers of the straggling crowds. Sir Gogendranath tried to relieve the noisiness by his wit; and it was her turn to shudder at his perfect English. She had read and heard many stories about these Maharajahs, these half-mythical beings descended from the Sun and the Moon and claiming kinship with the constellations; had read and heard about their Midas' touch transmuting everything to gold, about their coffers groaning with untold wealth and their harems bulging with innumerable beauties, about their midnight whoopees in mysterious harems, about their strange passion for the pink-and-white western flesh; and something shuddered in her spine as she recollected all that she had read and heard.

'I hope you enjoy it all,' the Maharajah broke in with a wide smile.

'Oh, yes, magnificent, very magnificent.' The fox-terrier yawned and seemed to concur. As the Maharajah was opening his mouth out of his mephistophelian moustache, his Beelzebub body seemed to become more and more human. He lost something of his hugeness in the eyes of Mrs Pimpernel.

The Jubilee celebrations went with a bang. The Maharajah expressed his deep and ancient loyalty to his King-Emperor; offered his thanks to the Agent for his friendship and guidance and Mrs Pimpernel for her gracious presence on that occasion; and announced bounties to his beloved subjects, innumerable bounties, which included the scrapping of the land revenue which his beloved subjects had refused to pay. The Agent, in his turn, extolled the virtues and the services of the Maharajah, announced an addition of two more guns to his Salute, and expressed his satisfaction at the loyalty and munificence of Sir Gogendranath, whom he described, as one of the pillars of the Empire. At which the Maharajah with much humility rose up and said that he was content to describe himself as a punkah-puller of the Empire.

The New Palace was filled with the augustness of Col Pimpernel, who rose to the occasion. He was violent in his gait, a bit virile in his speech; his wife a passion-flower of modest manners, revealing by turns her compressed flanks and her white teeth between the painted homologous lips. She appeared bird-like to the whispering crowd of hangers-on, her hips getting lyrical, even excited at the brazen music. The Maharajah from beneath his ceremonial and corporeal oppressiveness shuddered at her aspen beauty for the second time. She looked keenly at him, with pity for his corpulence, with scorn for his ridiculous figures of speech. Her rebukes were downright, withering.

§

In the evening, brilliant with silks and bizarre with all sorts of noises, the grand State dance was going on in the most lurid of the Palace-halls. It was the third or fourth time in his career that the gallant colonel was put to this test of tremulous excitement. For Mrs Pimpernel, this was the first time, and therefore excruciating. There was something wistful, far-off, and serpentine in the jingle-jangle of those trombones and cithars, something dark and egyptian in the painful music, in the garish fling of heavily bejwelled flesh, something inspiring the blood, something alluring and sinister, too, in the Maharajah conducting the mysteries as subtly as Beecham would conduct his orchestra.

These courtezans, Mrs Pimpernel had dimly guessed, have become part of the aesthetic circus of some Maharajahs and are even less expensive than the sexless quadrupeds preferred by others. They have developed such brittle and ardent bodies that they could dance and make love in the same gesture; and dancing is such an ambiguous art that each frank blood-and-fleshy posture might be taken as merely allegorical or frankly pornographic. Some of them, Mrs Pimpernel thoughtfully observed, seemed in the intoxication of the hour to perish and revive like roseate mushrooms, and mock at those unfortunate sisters who by constant misuse had stayed pampered and fat like the cruder sculptures of greek goddesses and could only boast of their mother's instinct and adulterous breasts. The dance was going on in patterns and bits of patterns, the dance, which like the dancing of all ages suggested sex and its climax, even annotated and underlined it.

The two hundred pounds of polygamous flesh was, on the other hand, taking a little reversionary interest in the flushed carnation flesh of Mrs Pimpernel, her wormy legs, and her acquisitive vampire fingers. She was absorbed in her fancies, wondering at the music, which slowly rose and ebbed and broke into ripples. Clever men might wonder how a Maharajah who takes no interest in books, has not even heard of D. H. Lawrence or his brood of imitators, takes such a passionate and divine delight in the urgency of

sex, the need of it, the utter want and helplessness of it. Maharajahs, Mrs Pimpernel might guess, are only men with creamy physiques ; and Man, in his infinite glory, in his satanic greatness, and in his gratitude to his gods, has found that all this burden of the flesh, this gnawing at the root, this ache and song and shuddering in the spine, all this jargon of spiritual hunger, must culminate in a brave sexual gesture, one big beastly contortion. This is his escape, his only way of salvation from the bondage of mortal coils.

The Agent relaxed ; his face fell in a reverie. He had grown tired of the tete-a-tete he had with the Minister without Portfolio, who was also the Chamberlain of the Bedchamber. Mrs Pimpernel expressed a desire for some respite from the jingle-jangle of the trombones and the witchery of those dancing eyes. Sir Gogendranath escorted her out, and when once she was out in the vast open halls she began to admire the wild decorations of the place.

'Would you like to see the show-room ?'

'Oh !'

'It is full of relics—very interesting relics.'

'Oh ! I would just like to see them.' Her face coloured with curiosity. He was transfixed with her luridly glowing de-luxe-soaped skin.

Which reminds us of her habits. The Agent dozed away the afternoons of his life and often the evenings in a snarling fashion, and while his gallant heart tom-tomed, Mrs Pimpernel would be busy stitching for a while or reading Edgar Wallace or more often romping out in her bluest of blue gowns. Which means that Mrs Pimpernel was still a blue-stocking.

When once they were in the show-room, it all looked weird ; the room was windless and lightless and luridly coloured and full of awful ancient paintings. The escutcheons looked sinister, the swords grew pointed, and the stones of necklaces shone like the eggs of mythical rocs. He explained to her the history behind everything. But she was interested in the pearls ; she had never seen such round big beautiful stones. One necklace specially caught her fancy, her excited feelings ; and it happened to be the most priceless and the very favourite of the Maharajah's. It had been coming down as a heirloom for centuries. 'Wonderful, isn't it ?' and Mrs Pimpernel laughed some cuckoo-laughter.

'You like it ?' As he said so, he observed the white flashes of her de-luxe skin. She could summon up her virginhood, and appear in her rawness and teens. Which made it clear that Mrs Pimpernel was not yet a matron.

The Maharajah's mind was working electrically. It must be remembered that if ever his mind wished to rise out of its mire, it could drop all the drowsiness of flesh and float above. She was ardently admiring the pearls, sitting on a sofa in a platonic posture. Three-fourths of her legs were actually visible, naked and vibrating in his eyes. He became timid, and coughed neo-platonically. But there was no hint, no suggestion of anything. She was beautiful, painfully beautiful.

He took a momentous step, wiped out the parsimony of ages.

'Would you like to have it ? Just as a humble present, a humble token ?'

'Oh ! It is too valuable, too good, I think.'

He took the necklace out of its setting. At that moment some psychic forces intervened and intertwined the spiritual fibres of their widely differing personalities. She noticed for the first time that he was smart ; she did not know that in his less obese days he had played polo at Hurlingham, the same season when Evelyn Dumbell was being hailed as the most beautiful debutante. He was endearing, his manners quite perfect. She had no aversion to his face which had noble and beautiful contours, but she could not bear the thought of his body, which was ugly, vile, and aggressive. The psychic

His brow was knotted with pain; his eyes dilated out of the two hundred pounds of flesh and had their last look at this world, which kept with it Mrs Pimpernel and his favourite pearl necklace.

forces issuing out of creation had not yet thought of mating these two essences, these two streams of electricity, working each its salvation in widely differing bodies. There was just a foreshadowing of that consummation. The psyche that governs that part of life was meditating as to the best means of achieving that climax, that union of spirits and bodies, which augurs higher utopias. For the present, he was a huge physiological problem.

'It is too valuable,' she said, as the Maharajah moved nearer her.

'I make bold to give it to you as a token.'

'As a token?'

'Yes, as a token, a memory of your visit to my Palace. . .'

'Oh!'

He put the necklace round her neck, and in a moment of exaltation or some strange impulse of the First Cause which works in queer ways he took her head between his hands and kissed and ravaged her face passionately. The slow-moving psyche was betrayed.

Mrs Pimpernel was shaken to the bottom. She gave him a slap, which went tingling down his back and stopped all singing in the spine; and before he could recover or realize his senses she walked abruptly into the dance-hall, suffused with her ravished feelings.

The courtezans were dancing their cobra dance. They vibrated and hissed in sinister movements; their hands twirled like serpentine leaves, their feet fluttered like feathers. They vibrated and hissed, slowly dropping their paper-like muslin-like folds, revealing more and more flashes of golden skin, hissing out passion, vibrating with fire, and even their hair whistling sharply—till the last clothes fell like autumn leaves and they lay like heaps of flesh.

The Agent was ecstatic with appreciative grunts. The Maharajah came in time to see him off. Mrs Pimpernel pirouetted away with a ruffle. The Minister without Portfolio, who never forgot that he was the Chamberlain of the Bedchamber also, escorted them to the Agent's quarters.

In the night, the Maharajah performed orphic mysteries in his shambles of desecrated women. Some murmured to Midas, while others perspired naked in their goddesshood. He lay wallowing in his pearl-and-silky nakedness. His *prima donna* suckled him consolingly at her breast. He bit her lips petal by petal, chewed large lumps of her cheek. He took peculiar pleasure in her stomach and listened to its rumbling secrets. He gnawed at her breasts. They lay like Isis and Osiris, or like one of Correggio's Venus and Adonis pictures, enveloped by dazzling mirrors. There was no further desecration. He went to sleep like a child.

Mrs Pimpernel's sleep, by the side of the gallant Colonel's tom-toming heart, was intensely disturbed with thoughts and dreams. She had never experienced such matronly feelings. She blushed and angered and fiddled unconsciously with her cushions. Her subnormal self was pleasingly agitated that the grand climacteric between the sexes of two continents was almost achieved; but her body ached with unpleasant sensations. She rose up and walked for a time; and then she too slept like a child.

The next morning Col Pimpernel, D. S. O., and his wife were ready to depart. The Agent was pleased with this visit. It was highly successful. His health had been toasted along with His Majesty's. He had forged new links, formed new friendships, specially with the delightful rogue of a Minister without Portfolio; and above all he had provided a background for the enchantments of his most beautiful wife. She put on her unforgettable smile, and her huge green hat, and was ready to pirouet up the coach. When there was unexpected news from the Palace.

The Maharajah, it seemed, was in a state of dissolution. The punkah-puller of the Empire was suffering from acute appendicitis. For the first he knew where his solar plexus lay.

Col Pimpernel and Mrs Pimpernel visited his death-bed. As Mrs Pimpernel looked vaguely at him, he lay like the biggest doll in a pantomime. The Colonel looked pensively. The concubines made a gesture of despair; the queens were crying realistically. The State doctors were apologetic; they had never reckoned with appendicitis, nor could recognize it, even if it knocked at their doors. The two hundred pounds of flesh lay heaving and throbling like a dying bird. Mrs Pimpernel looked at him, thoughtfully, with pity for his pain, with contempt for his forlornness. Her rebuke was still downright, withering. But there was psychic brilliance in his eyes, a pearl-and silky nakedness of feeling. He tried to corner Death with some cheerfulness and make a carnival of his last ebbing hour. But Death had stuck on to his appendicitis. His brow was knotted with pain; his eyes dilated out of the two hundred pounds of flesh and had their last look at this world, which kept with it Mrs Pimpernel and his favourite pearl-necklace.

SHALL I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changling course, untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor death shall brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest.
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

SHAKESPEARE

The KOLU

The Festival of Dolls

By
MANJERI
S. ISVARAN

'Aren't they lovely ?' Kamala asked, pointing the bride and the bridegroom.

SWISH!
The rope curved through the air and lashed the floor, her arms flapping like the wings of a bird as she skipped and her little brother and sister sat watching, full of interest. A girl but a

gazelle. Her dark eyes darkened more by collyrium smiled merrily; her ear-pendents shook and shed drops of emerald light into the hollows of her delicate clavicles as she skipped.

'How much?' she asked, with a sudden pause and slackening her grip on the wooden handles of the rope.

'Eighty,' said her sister.

'No, no. You've been counting wrong,' corrected Kamala. 'It's a hundred.'

'I *have* counted right,' rejoined the fluty voice, and if a girl of seven could be sure of her arithmetic it was in that voice of assertion.

'Well, well, we needn't quarrel over it,' said Kamala, with a tolerance that three years' seniority can show; 'I told you that you may have the rope after a hundred; if you want it early, why not ask and why count wrongly to cheat?'

The younger girl's face flushed as if it had been hit; she rubbed her eyes, her bosom rising and falling quickly the while, and then she began to whimper. Knowing the sympathetic vibration it would cause in her four-year-old brother and bring the mother into the scene Kamala cried cajolingly :—

'Hush, my dear, I didn't mean it;' and putting the skipping-rope into her hands, she turned to go.

'Stay,' the sister cried, 'I counted for you and you must count for me. You are angry and that's why you want to go.'

'I am not angry.'

'You are.'

'I am not.'

And just when the skirmish showed signs of becoming tearful there was a movement in one of the flaps of the front door, and a face appeared. Timidly it drew back.

'It's Sarasu,' exclaimed Kamala; 'I had asked her to come and see the *Kolu*.' And she ran towards the door, a very wind of welcome, while the younger sister, touched with a little of the same exuberance, ran behind her.

Sarasu was a dark girl, about eight or nine, shy as musk, and with eyes that had the shine and sincerity of diamonds. She lived in the same street, four doors away, and was a friend of Kamala's. She moved so softly like a shade that one wondered whether she would not, at any moment, be the shadow of it. Her voice was strangely sighing; its silvery ease seemed to be under an eternal muffle.

'I can only have a hasty look at the dolls,' she said; 'I must be back before she misses me.'

'How excited you are! Nothing will happen. Don't be afraid,' comforted Kamala, and locking her hand in Sarasu's led her into a room in the left wing of the house.

The *Kolu* was indeed a beautiful sight. The dolls stood on an wooden structure, rising tier on tier, under an arch made of light bamboo and papered prettily all over. There were dolls of celluloid and porcelain, in diverse shapes and hues, of brass and bronze polished to the brilliance of gold and silver, of marble and weak sandal-wood; toy-dogs with crimson collars and mouths in arrested bark; tabby cats ready to spring on the unsuspecting mice below; rabbits with ears pricked up and ever-startled eyes; horses some picketed and some in full gallop; elephants with trunks upraised as if pouring dust upon their heads; h. r. h. the Bengal tiger, conventionally furious; his magnificence, the lion; a couple of parrots preening their feathers with ruddy beaks; in fine there were all things human, winged, and fanged in that little world raised as it were by a rub on an Aladdin's magic lamp. So colourful was it and so intense; it had a touch of heaven as well as of earth and to the girls, its newness never faded, its mystery was greater than that of Creation itself.

'Look,' said Kamala, pointing to a father doll; 'what a big belly it has!'

They giggled.

'And there, in the topmost row, the bridegroom and the bride wearing their best clothes and holding each other's hand are lovely. Aren't they, Sarasu?'

Sarasu smiled faintly.

'How the bride hangs down her head in shyness! It will pain her neck, poor thing, thus looking at her toes always. Will you look at your toes,' Kamala asked, turning to her sister, 'when your husband garlands you during your marriage?'

This sally accompanied by a nudge which she gave her sister, tickled even the shy Sarasu; they tittered, looking at the celluloid bride whose sari which was a remnant from a tailor's cuttings seemed to go threadbare at the titter, and her necklace of glass beads to lose their iridescent play.

'What are you, girls, laughing at?'

The mother who had been busy in the kitchen for the past one hour or so entered the room with the question. She was not aware of the presence of Sarasu and seeing her, her face broadened into a smile and she said to the girl:—

'Kamala has been asking you every day to come and see the *Kolu*. This is the eighth day and we thought you would never come.'

'Not because I didn't want to come early,' replied the girl; 'she does not allow me to stir out of the house. I've come stealthily; I must be going now.'

'Wait a minute more and do sing a song. Everybody that comes to look at the *Kolu* must sing; you know that, my dear.'

Meenakshi then went into the kitchen and was back immediately bearing a vessel in her hands. It was covered.

It was evening now and the lamps that hung on either side of the bamboo arch were lit. The flames flickered for a while, then began to steadily burn like gems, and in the illuminated bower the dolls stared more eager-eyed than ever. Bottles cut out of coloured paper and pasted on the sides of the arch and imagined to contain attar of roses were unstoppered by the light; the yellow paint of the wooden plantains bending in a bunch seemed to peel off to reveal the ivory white inside. And a mirror on the wall opposite caught and kept within its gilded frames a replica of the eloquent swindle. Sarasu was lost in the loveliness of it all while she sang mechanically the latest tune she had learnt.

'That was done beautifully,' complimented Meenakshi, as the song ended. Now sit down, all of you, for here's something to eat.'

The girls sat down, Sarasu unwillingly, and into their cupped hands the mother ladled out of the vessel boiled white peas sweetened with jaggery. Sarasu hesitated to eat; Kamala encouraged her, and just when the girl was about to take a mouthful she heard her name sharply called.

'It's *she*,' she said in a scared tone, rising hastily, and before Meenakshi could prevent her, she had reached the verandah.

'What a pity!' Meenakshi murmured.

A young woman whose eyes detonated anger confronted the girl outside and hissing a 'Come along!' walked up the street. The girl followed her like as one neglected, and infinitely ill-used.

'So this is how you look after baby,' the woman asked the girl as soon as they were inside their house.

Sarasu, instead of giving a reply, dragged a toe along the floor.

'You won't come to good, I assure you,' she said, taking her howling child from the cradle, and her sudden silence during which she stared at the girl had more fury in it than in her words.

Sarasu continued to drag her toe along the floor. This was her first *Kolu* year without a mother; and her father had been in urgent need of a wife. Her *Kolu* dolls lay huddled in a basket somewhere in the attic; but a few stolen minutes before the dolls' house at her friend's had brought to her a splendid vision of the past and in that vision the dead had taken a halcyon turn with the living.

A MIXED BAG

'WAYFARER'

SYMPHONY IN BLACK

ALL about her is of black. She seems a spirit of the night and darkness. Her eyes are caverns, in the depth of which a secret glimmers. But their glance is like the lightning, a flash that breaks the night.

She is like a sun of ebony, a black star, yet darting rays of light and joy. Or rather, she is like the moon, who has surely marked her for her own; not the pallid planet of the idylls, who is like a chilly bride, but the wild and dizzy moon suspended in a stormy night; not the silver star that smiles upon the dreams of quiet men, but a dark and angry goddess, rapt from heaven by incantation, whom the necromancers forced to dance of old upon the frightened earth.

In her little head there lurks a will of iron, and a thirst for prey. Yet in that spirit-haunting face of hers, where the carven nostrils seem to breathe a magic air, the sweet mouth, red and white and lovely, glows with colour, like the splendour of a passion-flower on the brink of a volcano.

*

SOME DEFINITIONS

Belladonna: In Italian, a beautiful lady; in English, a deadly poison. A striking example of the essential identity of the two languages.

Garter: An elastic band, intended to keep a woman from flying out of her stockings and devastating the country.

Positive: Mistaken at the top of one's voice.

Peace: A period of cheating between two periods of fighting.

Litigant: A person about to give up his skin in the hope of retaining his bones.

Brain: The apparatus with which we think we think.

LIMOUSINE LIMERICK

There was a young man who said 'Snakes!
What a noise my new motor car makes.'
And the girl at his side
Indiscreetly replied,
'Well, declutch me, and jam on the brakes.'

*

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Want of money, bad health, bad temper, chastity, family ties, knowing that you know things, and believing in the Christian religion.

*

COCK AND HEN!

The daughter of a French Ambassdor, Baron de Coursel, told Mrs Will Gordon, traveller and writer, the story of a Frenchman who, after paying a somewhat lengthy visit to a certain English Marchioness, took his leave by saying:—

'You must excuse me that I have cockroached too much of your ladyship's time.' 'Oh, no,' said his hostess, adding gently, 'but we always say "encroached".' 'Oh, yes,' said her visitor, 'hencroached when I address your ladyship, and cockroached when I address his lordship!'

*

THE COMPLEAT EDITOR

An Editor who was always vaunting the purity, enterprise, and fearlessness of his paper was pained to observe that he got no subscribers. One day it occurred to him to stop saying that his paper was pure and enterprising and fearless, and make it so. 'If these are not good qualities,' he reasoned, 'it is folly to claim them.'

Under the new policy he got so many subscribers that his rivals endeavoured to discover the secret of his prosperity, but he kept it, and when he died it died with him.

BEAUTY IS TRUTH

By P. G. SUNDARARAJAN

'MARVELLOUS!'

'You mean, the figure?'

'Why—yes, of course. That, is, the way you have captured the atmosphere. Well, Kumar, here is genius.'

'Don't flatter, my dear fellow. It is only a scrawl.'

'Really! I wonder what would happen if you sat down to it with brush and paint . . . but then, you wouldn't handle the palette.'

Santanam looked at the picture in his hand again. It was a lightning sketch. Of a girl. She was moving forward. Her pose suggested a rapid walk. 'Kumar, your pencil is uncanny. This girl seems as if she would walk out of the picture even while I am looking.'

Yes, she walked. A girl in the bloom of her youth. Her head was a little tilted. Her saree flew backwards in mild undulations blending with the curved strokes in the background showing the sea waves. *A Girl Walking by the Sea-shore*—was a far too inadequate caption to that wonderful creation in pencil. Kumar came round and looked over Santanam's shoulder. He himself was delighted. Yes, he had caught the force of her movement. He knew that he had outlined her active figure in all the spirit of her youth.

Santaram could not take his admiring gaze off the sketch.

'Look here, Kumar. This picture must be painted; embellished with the delicate and truthful touches of colour. Where did you find her? Did she pose for you? No, she couldn't have. You have caught her unawares. Who is she, old chap? Friend of yours?' he poured forth in a rush of instinctive fervour and admiration.

Kumar waited till his friend finished expressing wonderment. 'I don't know who she is. I found her walking along the shore at Adyar. It was a casual sketch. A momentry glimpse of her graceful gait struck me particularly and I scratched about idly with my pencil. I hardly fancied such a result. I wish I did all my sketches with the same vigour.'

'Of course you always do. This is quite in your line, old chap. Why can't you give me an enlarged outline of it? I will paint the whole scene. I shall make her appear with the natural colours of her exquisite beauty. What a rhythmic pose! She must adorn the canvas.'

Kumar was a genius with his pencil. He excelled in rapid and rough impressions. His sensitive temperament expressed itself in the finest of lines. A stroke here, another there, and a picture was finished. Impatient and averse to plodding, he satisfied himself with marking out a space, which, bound by the lines he drew, revealed figures more life-like than photographic reproduction. Symmetry of form was inherent in his lines. He seldom had to rub out a first line.'

Naturally, he was not crazy over painting in which sphere Santanam had already earned a name. His brush was his medium, for Santanam. It responded to his slowly expanding imagination with amazing ease. His sense of colour rivalled the subtle scheme of the rainbow. Dividing the space on the canvas in his own mind, he would fill in the parts with dabs of colour the composition of which would produce the most pleasing effect. He discarded the preliminary outline as he always revelled in landscapes where the composition was not bound by restricted vision. Consequently, portraiture was not his strong point despite the fact that he was a painter.

But a co-operative effort that marked the bohemian life of these young

artists served to maintain their joint reputation as all-round artists. While Kumar helped with his sketches, Santanam would paint the picture. Meanwhile, they preserved their individuality in their respective media.

Santanam adorned Kumar's enlarged sketch with the skilful touches of his brush until the life-like figure of the girl was radiant on the canvas. It was a study in blue. The girl in a light blue saree; the deep blue of the sea in the background; and the grey blue of the evening sky above.

They sent it to the Fine Arts Society's annual exhibition among their other works. The result was inevitable. The picture won the Governor's Medal and His Excellency himself purchased it. They had named it *The Rhythm of Youth*. Santanam's name was on the lips of every art-critic and connoisseur. *The Rhythm of Youth* bore his signature. While there was universal praise for the colour study and atmosphere, special emphasis was laid upon the grace and rhythm of the figure. Kumar was more than satisfied at this though he did not grudge the complete triumph for his friend. After all his was a rough impression, he thought; Santanam had endowed it with almost three-dimensional visibility.

Santanam was heartened beyond measure. He had painted a portrait subject! In a fit of enthusiasm he packed his colour-box and went to the Theosophical gardens in Adyar. He set up his small easel and was painting a part of the vast garden when she came.

Santanam had not noticed her though he had a vague idea that she would be somewere there. In fact, he had come there in search of the subject of his winning picture. He turned, brush in hand, conscious of the fact that somebody was watching his work from behind.

He beheld two girls; one of them, he instantly recognised as the beautiful subject of Kumar's sketch. The girls, a little embarrassed, turned to go.

'Why? Don't you like the picture?' he queried, anxious to fall into step with them.

The girls looked at each other with questioning smiles and stopped.

'Oh, yes, we do like it immensely,' replied the other girl. 'Are you not the artist who won the Governor's Medal with—the—with that wonderful picture of yours?'

'If you mean who was responsible for that poor attempt, it was, of course, I,' returned Santanam with polite gallantry, looking at the younger of the two girls.

'You are too modest,' retorted the elder one with a mischievous glance at her companion. 'Have you seen her often?' she asked suddenly, nodding at her.

'Well, no. I mean to say, not often. In fact. . .'

'Then how were you able to paint her likeness so truthfully. Don't ask us to beleive that it was not Kalpagam that won you the prize,' concluded the girl without giving him time to make himself clear. She went on to expatiate upon the graceful pose of the figure and the charming blend of colours while the embarassed Kalpagam, she who had expressed the rhythm of youth for these artists, blushed and looked away with wistful eyes that sparkled with sudden self-realisation.

Saroja! . . . please,' Kalpagam tried to protest.

Santanam thought that silence was best under the circumstances. He cast a look at Kalpagam.

'Pardon me. I hope I did not offend you?' he said.

'Offend me?' Kalpagam repeated with a faint trace of amused wonder in her tones. 'You have flattered me I was of course at first embarrassed on seeing myself in the picture. Did I deserve it?'

'On the other hand, it was you who inspired me to excel myself in my medium. You are self-conscious. Art is mainly concerned with beauty of form and colour which were in your case. . .

oh—well, you know how we artists do good work only when we are inspired.'

He finished awkwardly and turned to his work confused.

'You must come home and tell those highly technical things to my father. He is a lover of art. Do come, will you?' Kalpagam pleaded.

*

When a month later, Santanam announced to Kumar his forthcoming wedding with Miss Kalpaga Bai, his friend, as usual, offered him his felicitations. It was only after Santanam revealed the identity of Kalpagam that Kumar understood the significance of Santanam's mysterious absence on many an evening and his self-satisfied silence. So he was lucky enough to get the girl whom he had adorned with his rich and colourful imagination! Santanam told him the whole story of his meeting the girl and the consequent friendship which had naturally ripened into love.

'I am sorry, Kumar. From the beginning she was under the impression that I was entirely responsible for the picture. I had no occasion to tell her the truth about the whole affair. I was confused. . . you know what it means when the girl you have painted the likeness of, comes and expresses her adoring admiration.'

'That is all right, Santa. After all, you gave the real likeness to the picture. Don't let that worry you. Accept my congratulations.'

Yet, there was in the back of Kumar's mind something that gave rise to a peculiar feeling of disappointment. He least suspected that he could be jealous until he attended the wedding. One steady look at the beautiful apparition who was the bride, was sufficient to tell him what he had missed. Under different circumstances that is, had she known the truth beforehand. . . well, what was he thinking of? Silly, wasn't it, indulging in hypothetical reflections? When she was introduced to her he was thrilled at her voice and mien. Instinctively his mind sketched an outline of her sparkling personality.

He came home. He took out the small sketch he had made months back and sat gazing at it with a growing sense of despair. Realizing with a pang that she was now his friend's wife, he put away the picture and tried to forget her. He refused to admit to himself that her vision was now sketched out in his mind with indelible accuracy.

Santanam missed Kumar all of a sudden. A week later, a brief letter from Bombay informed him that Kumar had accepted a position as the staff artist of an illustrated paper. His absence, however, did not worry Santanam very much. He had Kalpagam with him for inspiration and enjoyment. He fell back upon his old vocation of landscape painting, now that Kumar was not there to help him in portraiture.

*

SOUTH INDIAN ARTIST LEAVES FOR LONDON

ENTHUSIASTIC FAREWELL

Bombay, June 8.

Mr Kumara Vel, the well-known artist of Madras, was given a hearty send-off by the art-lovers of Bombay, on the eve of his departure to England to undergo a course in painting at the Royal College of Art. Mr Kumar who was chiefly known for his vigorous pencil-sketches has been elected a scholar of the College on the strength of his recent effort at painting which was purchased by Sir Maneklal Hukum Chand, the jeweller.

Santanam, coming across this piece of news one day, began to think a bit. So Kumar had become a painter too! This meant that he would never require his help thereafter. Why shouldn't he take up sketching to compensate the absence of Kumar's help? His wife, the beautiful Kalpagam, who made no secret of her admiration of the few examples of Kumar's sketches that Santanam had with him, goaded him on to this. Nor had Santanam been ignorant of Kumar's disappointment. But, as he often told himself,

there was no helping it. His connivance at falsehood was, he felt convinced, due to circumstantial exigencies. Hence, he did not make any attempt to renew the correspondence between him and Kumar which had for some time past ceased.

Santanam began learning to sketch. He worked hard. But there was no joy in his work. He worked with the forced frenzy of a man who wants to finish his duty and have done with it. The process of development presented many difficulties. His perception, trained long in the appreciation of colour shades, refused to adapt itself easily to the linear expression of an idea or a subject. The result was grotesque.

Kalpagam wanted him to sketch their child. Yes, Santanam and Kalpagam had reaped the fruit of their love. Santanam was not sure of himself. If Kumar were present, he would have done it in no time, Kalpagam told him banteringly.

That was enough to infuriate Santanam. He replied in terms that were not complimentary either to Kalpagam or to Kumar.

But his pride was wounded. He would show her what he was made of. For a week he struggled. He made innumerable attempts to bring out the likeness of his child with the help of his pencil. At last he succeeded—in producing a ludicrous caricature. Kalpagam's first instinct was to laugh aloud at it. The next moment she realised the failure of her husband. Tears trickled down her cheeks that were touched with an extra tinge of crimson as in *The Rhythm of Youth*.

Santanam's attempts had strange results, too. He was hailed as a great cartoonist and humorous artist. His caricatures were reproduced all over the press of the country. This was lucrative. He left painting for a while.

Behold him now the star artist of the *Patna Herald*, Bihar's leading newspaper. In between his daily cartoons he painted landscapes for calendars.

Santanam had just entered the house. His face was beaming. He had in his hand a copy of *The Studio*. He flaunted it before Kalpagam who was singing the last strains of a lullaby. Her year-old child was sleeping peacefully in the cradle.

'Kalpaga, my caricature of the Viceroy and the Liberals has been reproduced in this. A note refers to it as a very highly refined form of the cartoonist's art. Now perhaps you would agree that I am improving, won't you?' He asked her, dropping himself into an easy-chair and throwing the art-magazine at Kalpagam. The girl opened it and found the proof to her great joy. She came to him smiling, idly turning the copiously illustrated pages of the periodical.

'I wonder what Kumar thinks of that. Perhaps he might never see it, the big man he is nowadays. I wish he were here . . . '

Kalpagam suddenly stopped at a page and interrupted him. 'You are wrong. Kumar has already seen this, perhaps. He ought to have. Look!' She gave him the magazine.

Santanam took it and glanced at the page wonderingly. There were two large pictures on opposite pages. *The Dawn*; *Mahatma Gandhi*: *Day of Silence*; by Kumara Vel, announced the legends under them.

On the next page was an article entitled *The Art of Kumara Vel*. Santanam read it while Kalpagam followed it looking over his shoulder. The writer was an eminent art-critic. After tracing the evolution of Kumar's art he declared:

'. . . In the Renaissance of Indian Art Kumar stands out for his unbiassed and sincere expression. He is not bound by superficial conventions. He is broad-minded enough to combine Eastern idealism with modern (not to be confused with the Western in its narrow sense) realism. His two pictures reproduced here were recently exhibited in the Paris *Academie*

Francaise and were promptly purchased by that hawk-eyed American art-collector T. T. Jennings of Chicago. It is not too much to hope that Kumara Vel's masterpieces will soon adorn the walls of the National Gallery. . .'

'Isn't it splendid? Our Kumar, an international figure!' exclaimed Kalpagam in genuine admiration.

A sense of despondency and hollowness weighed Santanam's mind down. He gazed at the two pictures for sometime and murmured, 'Lucky chap, dear old Kumar. India should be proud of him.'

'I think you are not any the less lucky. You may also make your name one of these days. Don't despair, dear. Try and attain the peak of perfection. Once you told me that I inspired you. Have I ceased to be a source of inspiration,' pleaded Kalpagam.

'That was long ago. Kumar had opportunities. I had none. What I thought was my luck actually proved an obstacle in my path.'

'Meaning?' Kalpagam raised her eyebrows slightly in mock surprise.

'Now don't misunderstand me. When I married you, Kumar said I was very lucky. He would have gladly changed places with me then. . . But the fact is luck was with him all the time.'

'Yes, it is I who came into your lives and spoiled your career. But why should you go out of your way and paint the likeness of an innocent girl. You started the game first, don't you know,' argued Kalpagam, still in a playful mood. Santanam's guilty mind recognised an accusation in the words. His sense of despair had embittered his temper.

'But it was not I. I had never seen you. It was Kumar who first—' he checked himself too late.

'Yes?' Kalpagam prompted with a wondering look, sensing something till then unknown.

Santanam saw that there was no way out of it. 'You see, Kumar sketched you first and I worked the picture on it afterwards. I had not seen you before that. But Kumar had seen you and registered a rapid impression.'

Kalpagam receded in outraged horror. Her soft and dreamy eyes widened with suspicion.

'Then—then—what you told me about inspiration and imagination was—was—a lie!'

'If you will have it that way, yes. After all, what does it matter now?'

'Now! now, after you have deceived me and your friend! God! is there not any vestige of truth in you?'

'Don't talk ethics now,' Santanam flared forth exasperated. 'Art knows not those differences. Beauty is Truth, for Art. You were beautiful. I painted you. That was truth enough for me.'

'But—but Kumar's sketch was your foundation.'

Kalpagam's tone was husky. Tears welled up in her eyes as she thought of Kumar, alone in his triumph with no friend to share the joy of his success.

'Foundation . . . rubbish . . . As if one cares for foundations. Don't get sentimental. Do you think a lover of beauty would dig around the house to have a look at the foundation instead of feasting his eyes on the beauty of the architecture . . . ?'

Kalpagam screamed in terror. There was a thundering rumble; a quivering of the floor. The wall cracked and the ceiling came down. She rushed forward to him.

'No! the child!' he shouted. Kalpagam flew back to the cradle. There was a deafening crash—Santanam was buried in the debris.

Kalpagam gathered the child and clutched it to her bosom.

There was another crash. Another part of the ceiling bore down upon her.

Outside, the earth was torn to pieces. Buildings shook and crumbled down in

disintegrated blocks. Men, women, and children fled helter skelter, were caught in the gaping cracks, or crushed down by falling masses. Tragic screams and pathetic wailings rent the air; but were drowned in the deafening roar of Nature that showed itself in its ugliest mood. For miles around, the quake spread, swallowing villages and towns, knocking the foundations out of man-built structures. Thousands perished before they realised the immenseness of the tragedy. The hard earth wobbled and wriggled like a waveline and broke into black and hungry chasms enveloping massive structures that went to unexpected doom in the midst of what had till then seemed eternal routine. For once, perhaps, the cosmic consciousness wanted a change in an orderly universe.*

*

In strange contrast the morning sun shed its dim rays on Gower Street in the capital of the British Empire. Kumar got up from his bed quite uneasy. He had a restless night, had very bad dreams. At breakfast his morning mail awaited him. The letters were the same as usual. Invitations to dinners, appreciations, and appeals. Strange, he thought, that the English used their colour-prejudice to suit their convenience. Perhaps the necessity of colour in an artist's life had overcome their prejudice in his case. He opened the *Daily Herald* and a streamer in screaming letters struck his eye.

DISASTROUS EARTHQUAKE IN INDIA

UNPARALLED HAVOC IN BIHAR

THOUSANDS KILLED
VILLAGES WIPED OUT
PATNA A CITY OF RUINS
NATURE'S UGLY DANCE

He read with horror the sickening details. His head reeled. Here he was in London, making his name, while his country was being destroyed by order of God. Patna! What had happened to Santanam and Kalpagam? He dressed hurriedly and rushed out. He sent a cable to Calcutta enquiring about the couple.

The reply came that night. They had perished. Details were not fully to hand yet. But few escaped in Patna.

He sat with his head in his hands. Life seemed to him empty. Kalpagam—how did she bear the sight! What thoughts must have crossed her tender heart when the house came down upon them! The child—and Santanam; what an end to his friend in profession! His mind came back again and again to Kalpagam and the child.

His hand slowly took the brush and palette. He went to the easel and like one in a dream worked on oblivious of everything. In the grim silence of that studio, far into the long dark hours he painted with increasing frenzy of emotion, slowly but surely mounting to a crescendo of sensitive agony . . .

*

It was a fortnight later. Kumar had booked his passage to India. To the impassioned protests of his friends he replied that Art would take care of itself. On the eve of his departure he was in Fleet Street dining much against his will with a group of journalists. On his way to his rooms he looked into the office of *The Hindu*.

The representative of the staid old paper of Madras received him with a respect betokening his pleasant surprise and showed him the detailed reports of the earthquake disaster He pointed with importance to a paragraph under the heading "The Hindu" Earthquake Relief Fund which read: 'Mr Kumara-Vel has donated the entire sum realised from the sale of his earthquake masterpiece (amounting to Rs. 25,000) to the Central Earthquake Relief Fund.'

Kumar waved him aside and left the building, his brow clouded with deep thought. Once in his room he rang up Lord Cecil Greenwood.

* See wrapper design.

'His Lordship is out. His secretary Thornton, speaking. Can I do anything for you?'

'Kindly ask him to send back my picture as soon as he arrives. I am sending back the money he paid. Tell him I am sailing to-morrow.' Before the astonished secretary could protest Kumar rang off.

Lord Greenwood arrived in haste and anger.

'What is this, Mr Kumar? How can you go back. . ?'

'I beg your lordship's pardon. But I have changed my mind. I am going to my country. I want that picture, as it is a phase of experience fancied rather than felt.'

'But, young man, you don't understand. I have waited so long to have one of your pictures!'

'In that case I shall exchange that for this, if you like,' said Kumar as he displayed the picture of a ruined temple with a Sadhu sitting before it, immersed in the pervading atmosphere of peacefulness.

Lord Greenwood pursed his lips. 'Blast it, the young feller is sincere,' he murmured. 'All right, I'll take it. Remember this Mr Kumar, you are the only true artist I have seen in your country which is crammed with damned humbugs who pose themselves as the mystic-school artists. Mystic, fiddlesticks!' He bustled out, satisfied at the transaction.

*

The Mayor of Madras had convened a meeting to collect funds for the earthquake relief. It was a second meeting, a month and more after the disaster. Kumar was specially invited to be present. His picture, *Her Child*, was placed prominently on a high easel.

It represented a young mother running towards a cradle. In the background buildings were crashing down. It was the picture that Kumar painted in London the night he received the cable. It was about this picture that Mr Patric Slashe, the most caustic critic of London wrote: 'You could hear the fall of the buildings. The rumble of the 'quake seems to vibrate through the canvas. If you approach the picture you feel as if the next mass of buildings will crash on you. As for the mother, well, don't look at her figure. You cannot hold back the tears if you do . . .'

Speeches were made describing the havoc wrought by the 'quake and the picture afforded a striking example. It moved the hearts of the people to such an extent that thousands of rupees were collected on the spot. An announcement was made that the picture was presented by the artist to the Theosophical Society.

Mrs Mary O'Brien, a kindly lady, and leading spirit of the Theosophical Society at Adyar was talking to Kumar the next day. They were discussing the position of the picture in the cool vestibule of the Library. The talk turned upon Kumar's future activities.

'Well, I don't think I have much to live for after this.' He gazed at the picture. 'I don't know. I may go on a world tour or just wander about anywhere. In any case life has lost its fascination for me,' he spoke with a faint and pathetic smile.

'Now, now, Mr Kumar, please compose yourself. I appreciate your feelings. But you have your art.'

'Yes, I have it. There it is, hanging in this hallowed building. But what is the use? Did I derive any consolation? Curiously enough, the whole affair began here in Adyar.'

'Yes, yes. I know,' put in the lady sympathetically. 'It is not for me to advise you, but you really must.'

Their talk was interrupted by the arrival of Saroja with a small boy of

about a year and a half. The child was pointing towards the picture, *Her child*, and shouting.

Mother!' exclaimed he suddenly, and tried to get off the arms of the young lady who, seeing Kumar, stopped short. Kumar, taken aback by the child's interest in the picture, approached the lady.

Saroja answered the unspoken question of Kumar. 'Yes, Mr Santanam's child.'

To Kumar's look of incredulous wonder she replied. 'He was the child that was reported as having miraculously escaped. Kalpagam lived to see him taken charge of by the rescue party. She died after hours of agony.'

Kumar stretched out his arms. The child flew to him in glee.

'Mrs O'Brien,' said Kumar in husky tones, 'you are right. I have something to live for. Not my art. This boy!'

The child flew to him in glee.

THE PASSION PLAY

By NAVAGAR

IT was the second month of Spring. Mango boughs were hanging heavy with fruits and the green all around was spangled with variegated bloom. A western wind had risen for some days, telling of the monsoon on the western ghats and foretelling foamy fresh in the rivers. In a short time, the fallow fields would be filled with the flood to turn them into emerald and gold.

It was the second month of Spring. The tiny village of Mangalam, rising on one of the branches of the Cauvery, like a lyric on the flowing imagination of a poet, was intensely alive. It was overcrowded with guests and visitors who had poured in to witness the traditional passion play of the village. For the first time in the history of the village, the usual plays were abandoned owing to some local quarrel. It seemed there would be no plays at all that year. But the difficulties were somehow overcome and the villagers managed to conduct their last play at least.

From a distance, the village of Mangalam was but a grove of co-coanut palms; but when one approached it, he saw a temple towering over the houses of the few streets there, seeming to preside over the village's life. The temple contained a Chola marvel in bronze, a dancing Krishna, which every villager loved as his own child. The temple was as much house as their houses and none there ever felt that they were flesh and blood and their Krishna was bronze. Along with the lands around, the village was a free gift by a Tanjore Nayak king to a group of Brahmin families devoted to the arts of music, dance, and drama. The Brahmins were comely, and children were born in Mangalam with unerring musical sense, with the instinct to dance tingling in their veins. The cultivation of the lands over, the Mangalam Brahmins sat at home in their pials, large as their leisure, and practised the arts of music and dance; the elders taught the youngsters and the youngsters, the children. The seniors perused the Sanskrit treatises on the arts and discussed theory in the afternoons, while boys studied the masterpieces of Sudraka and Kalidasa. In the last month of the year, they began their two-month rehearsals. Then came the month and the festival for which the whole village seemed to live. In Vaisakha, when the moon is on its increase, the village celebrated the Spring Festival of its God, the dancing Krishna. The days were marked with feasting, and for two weeks, there was a programme of passion plays all through the nights. It is said that in the olden days the king of Tanjore camped at the village and sat through whole nights to enjoy the haunting music, the exhilarating dances, and the exquisite Abhinaya of the Mangalam Bhagavatars. But the king was not the president; the dancing Krishna presided from his seat in the temple before which the plays went on in the open. The great art was a sacred offering made to Him by His devotees.

Whether the good custom currupts the world or not, the world currupts the good custom, certainly. The eldest of the village Bhagavatars was the corrupter. This Narayana Bhagavatar known as old Nanu, to whose family belonged the office of leading the chorus behind the plays and the general direction and conduct of the drama-festival, was intolerant of young talent. Suddenly one year, he discovered in a youngster by his side in the chorus, a potential rival in music. The youngster was Hari, the darling of the whole village and its neighbourhood. As a boy, he had played all the boy-roles and every visitor from every adjacent village blessed him and invoked the dancing Krishna to

bless him. Narayana Bhagavatar was the solitary hater of young talent in the village. He was the first of his kind in Mangalam. He had sent his son away to another village to live in his father-in-law's house to follow more profitable vocations which the Mangalam people considered very ignoble. He wore his laces, gold chains, and Todas, presented by the king, always, and walked like the king of Tanjore himself. He would sing his own praises, order the boys to go on his errands incessantly, and remark bitingly if anybody were to be sitting when he passed. His personality was oppressing the villagers' minds. As the traditional leader of the chorus, he was to start the play, sing the songs, accompany the actors' songs and do the introductory chats with all the entering characters. He was very fond of displaying his wit in the comic interludes and tracked the play this way and that as he pleased. Though everyone in the village disliked him in his heart, none dared to show his feeling to this village elder.

Hari grew into a beautiful youth; never was a more charming man born. Gazing at him, youths wished they were women. Enchanted by his music the king sent for him often and for long stays at his court. As Hari marched from glory to glory, old Nanu Bhagavatar began to burn with jealousy. When Hari's father asked of Nanu Bhagavatar the hand of his last daughter for Hari, the Bhagavatar stoutly refused. Whenever and wherever possible, he tried to snub young Hari; criticised his music as impure, technique defective, and practice poor.

In the year of which we were speaking, when the rehearsals were to begin in Phalguna, Narayana Bhagavatar contrived to pick a petty quarrel with the villagers and left for the village where his son was. He did not return. Chaitra came to a close and the festival was nearing. Narayana Bhagavatar was worse. It was the marriage-time and young Hari had been brought to the same village where the Bhagavatar was staying, by a local mirasdar on the occasion of his daughter's marriage; and for many days afterwards, the only topic at the village pials, temple, tank, and riverside was the celestial strains of Hari which, they said, seemed to be still floating in the village, about the houses and about the groves, like some witch's spell. wizard

It was a morning in early Vaisakha. Narayana Bhagavatar after a heavy breakfast, filled his mouth with betel and tobacco and sat on the pial of his Sambandhi's house. The village munsiff of his native village of Mangalam came.

'It is God's service. There is no room here for any personal hates. It is time; you must start for Mangalam at once.'

'Who sent you here, Panchanadam?'

'The Village Panchayat met and I was chosen for this noble task of bringing you back.'

'How are the rehearsals?'

'They have gone on well till now; they are still going on.'

'Who conducts? who sings?' asked the Bhagavatar, barking, unpleasant surprise driving him into a sudden fit.

'Hari's father, who has been by your side all these years.'

'Hari's father! Hari's father! Why, let him lead and conduct the plays also. I have determined not to return to Mangalam.'

'Our Krishna will be angry. For your own welfare at least, reconsider. Do not deprive yourself of our Krishna's grace.'

'Young man, don't you realise I am an elder. A man of my age knows more ot God and grace. Now, go back and inform the Panchayat or even God Krishna Himself that Narayana Bhagavatar is not coming back. If it so comes to pass, there are no plays this year; and perhaps, no more plays in Mangalam.'

'What? No more plays?'

'Yes. Neither would I come nor would I relinquish the role that is the monopoly of my family.'

'You, dog in the manger!'

'Call me what you please. I expected this, for, this morning, a widow came in front as I was going to the river and a dog was following me, barking and howling.'

'Old man, beware of these omens.'

'Pooh! These omens! Why, they have already come true; the widow is the Panchayat of Mangalam and the barking and howling dog is yourself.'

Panchanadam, the village munsiff, was furious against the old Bhagavatar. He stared fiercely at the Bhagavatar for a few seconds. His eyes seemed to catch fire. The Bhagavatar was frightened for a moment; he regained his courage and impudence at once and said: 'Panchanadam, do you think that you will get Avesa even in mufti?'

Panchanadam was the traditional player of the role of the fierce Narasimha in the last play, the Triumph of Prahlada, while doing which he used to get into frenzy every year and become the terrific Man-Lion God Himself for some moments. Panchanadam was silent for a while; then turned and got down the steps of the house. From the street he turned to the Bhagavatar and said, 'Beware of the omens!' On his journey back to Mangalam he felt infinite pity for the foolish Bhagavatar. And as he approached his village, sorrow swelled and weighed heavily on him. He dragged himself into the Agrahara and as he saw the temple, he came to a stop, tears streaming from his eyes. The villagers who were eagerly expecting him crowded round him and took him to the temple front. Before their dancing Krishna, Panchanadam told those assembled there of the stubbornness and stupidity of old Narayana Bhagavatar.

Hari suddenly began to speak: 'My elders, it is our duty to conduct the annual plays; they cannot stop.'

Before he finished, an old woman of the village drew the attention of the assemblage to her. She was the grand old woman of the village drama. She knew the songs of all the plays and would herself train the boys in the steps and gestures. She said with the authoritative voice of age: 'No, the plays shall not stop; rains will fail; crops will not grow; trees will wither; our daughters will not bear children; and disease will sweep our homes!'

'True, grandmother,' said Hari in a feeling tone. 'True gentlemen; every bit of all this will surely happen. Why should we stop the plays this year?'

'But what can we do? The old man refuses to set foot on Mangalam,' said one.

'The village is already doomed' said another.

'No, no, the plays shall go on. My elders, it must be plain to you all that not Narayana Bhagavatar, but I am the author of this crisis. All this bad temper in the venerable old man is due to me. Though unbecoming of him, one of his age and one born in Mangalam, to feel so jealous of young talent, he has chosen to be so. You may all remember how, on the opening day of the rehearsals, now two months ago, he walked into the house with the cymbals in his hand, asked as if screaming, 'Who is Hiranya this year?' my father respectfully pointed towards me and after a bad wordy war, he threw the cymbals and walked away, making the vow that he would never again touch the cymbals in his lifetime. All this passsion and oath, I am responsible for. As long as I sing and dance, as long as I take Hiranya's role in the last night's play, Narayana Bhagavatar will have nothing to do with the duty to which he has been born. For public good, I now resolve before you all and before our dancing Krishna, with your permission and the permission of the dancing Krishna, to retire.'

So saying, Hari turned towards the Lord, bowed to him and walked away. The villagers shouted, 'No, we do not permit you; our Krishna does not permit you.' But Hari walked away. He

crossed the fields and entered the casuarina tope whistling on the river-bank. There he laid his body down on his uppercloth and lay looking into heaven. He prayed to Krishna to pardon the old Bhagavatâr and him also. 'Terribly sad am I, Krishna, that I will not be able to offer You mine best this year. Perhaps it is Your desire that I should be deprived of the honour of feasting You with my performance . . .' In such and similar strains, Hari, apostrophied Krishna and wept. When he rose the moon told him that he was already late for the worship of Sandhya. Hari finished his prayers and returned home, feeling that his life had suddenly become a waste.

The village elders grew desperate as the days of the plays neared. The womenfolk did their household work mechanically. Cheerlessness wrapped Mangalam in its gloom. And rumours of the stopping of plays at Mangalam went from village to village and along with the rumour, the gloom spread. The play-days came. In years past, there was scarcely any room in the village on these days; now, not even the villagers of Mangalam stirred out. In years past, the village was all noise on these days; now, not even a bee hummed.

'Rukmangada must have taken place to-night.'

'Last year, this time, I was sitting there seeing Usha.'

'If things had gone all right, we must be seeing Krishna dancing with the Gopis now.'

'This is the time when Mrikandu opens the play every year on this night.' . . . .

Night after night, men and women, young and old, were thus saying to each other as the playtime began, in extreme weariness. Dismal was the village, dismal the temple, dismal, every house there. It looked as though elders had lost their children, children their elders, youths their youthful wives, and girls their youthful husbands.

There were but two more days for the play-season to come to an end. There was a big dust-storm and gust after gust of wind broke into the sanctuary and blew out the lights before the deity. As the priest lighted it, the camphor died out; cocoanuts broke awkwardly. The attendant dropped the plate of offerings, slipped down in the ablution-water, throwing the huge bell on the foot of the priest. That night, the grand old woman of the village went almost mad. She ran about the streets, waking every-body. There was a midnight meeting before the temple. The grandmother addressed: 'Listen, I am just awake from a dream, a vision. Krishna came to me and spoke to me. Terrible will be the disaster that will befall our Mangalam. Try to conduct at least the last and the chief play of ours, the Triumph of Prahlada.' She departed. Each came to his pial and sank in thought. The whole village spent the rest of the night, sleepless. Early next morning, as soon as the first shafts of the sun's light struck the tower, the village elders bathed in the river, offered special service to Krishna, and met in council in the front Mantapa of the temple. It was decided that the Panchayat officers and the leading performers of the village should wait in deputation on Narayana Bhagavatar to request him to return and conduct the last play of Prahlada, at least. It was decided also that Hari should play Hiranya.

*

The full moon was sailing majestically in the blue sky like a swan in a vast lake, and along the fields' footpaths, lithe lasses and leaping lads were over-taking one another in the race towards Mangalam. The swarm of men and women looked like a dark river flowing through the fields. Old men and women were walking slowly, exchanging tales and traditions of the passion plays of Mangalam.

'They had never stopped them before.'

'Yes, they fear that the village will be blasted if they stop the plays.'

'It is a bad day for the village on which Narayana Bhagavatar chose to quit it.'

'It is a worse day for the Bhagavatar himself.'

'You are right. Such a bad votary, this village and this art had never produced before. They say that with the efforts which Bhagiratha took to bring the Ganges, they brought him back to conduct the last play at least.'

'Isn't the last play Prahlada?'

'Yes; Hiranya as it is also called. It is their best, the climax of their series. Hiranya especially, played by Hari, will be marvellous. I have been seeing these plays since boyhood but do not remember another artiste like young Hari.'

Another talk related to the character of God Narasimha who appeared at the end of the play.

'It will take three o'clock in the morning for Narasimha to appear.'

'Who plays the God's role?'

'Usually, it is the village munsiff, Panchanada Bhagavatar.'

'Oh! he is a very devout person. He fasts for the whole day, bathes at midnight and then only dons the mask of the Man-Lion God.'

'No wonder he gets possessed of divinity when he wears that mask.'

'The mask is worshipped as God Himself in his family and to-night, before he puts it on, it will be in worship, by the side of the deity in the temple.'

A batch of youngsters now passed those who went talking thus. They were discussing the prospective points of surprise in that night's play.

'They say, old Nanu Bhagavatar was stubborn.'

'I always hated peevish Nanu.'

'He is efficient in his work, but bad at heart. He is the first man in Mangalam to leave his son to drift into an alien walk of life.'

'And the first elder of Mangalam to hate young talent.'

'We must closely observe him to-night; he will come into conflict with Hiranya very often.'

'Hari is too good; he will not insult the elder.'

'But the elder, you will see, will try to snub Hari whenever and wherever possible.

*

In front of the temple, there was space not even for a pin to fall. The procession over, Krishna had been placed in the temple, facing the open stage where the play was to take place. The orchestra set itself in order and stilling the buzzing noise in the crowd, Narayana Bhagavatar appeared with the cymbals in his hands; other accompanists came and stood by his side and behind him. Nanu Bhagavatar struck the cymbals and sang, calling upon the religious clown. The Konangi appeared and disappeared. Prayer-songs followed and then the Chamberlain of the mighty demon Hiranya, the terror of the three worlds, entered with unerring footwork. As he retired announcing the entry of Hiranya, there was a great silence of expectancy in the audience. Hari was to appear immediately as Hiranya. The text-reader had sung the verse describing the coming Hiranya. Tense was the moment. Old Nanu struck the cymbals to begin the entrance Daru of Hiranya and from behind the temporary curtain held by two persons, the jingle of the footbeats arose as Hari began his dance. The old Bhagavatar was dumb, he did not open the song; after a few seconds, his hands too became still. In the enthusiasm of the moment, none noticed that Nanu Bhagavatar was neither singing nor keeping time. The song was sung by others; the Jalars were struck by others and with magnificent steps, lyric lilts, and superb bearing, Hari danced into the audience. Kayathu appeared, then Prahlada, and then Hiranya's preceptor, Sukracharya. Finding his little son god-minded and chanting always the name of his worst enemy, God Narayana, Hiranya asked his men to kill his

son by all possible means. Prahlada could not be killed. All this time, old Nanu had sung in accompaniment to every other character except Hiranya. In the middle of the play, further, the Bhagavatar got offended more than once when, in the comic interludes, some youngsters beat him hollow in the display of extempore wit and ripped him through and through. Old Nanu was fretting and fuming. It was the last scene of the play. Angry Hiranya took the hand of calm Prahlada and paced up and down, stamping his foot and waving his sword.

'Is your God in this pillar, you little chip?'

'Yes, my father.'

'Is He in this pillar?'

'Yes, father.'

Dead still was the audience. Hiranya dragged calm Prahlada to the curtain-side and cried aloud:—

'Is He in this pillar?'

'Undoubtedly.'

At once, Hiranya flung Prahlada aside, jumped, and gave a kick to the pillar. A terrible noise arose like a thunderclap. Held by a dozen stalwarts by fast cloths tied about his waist, the Man-Lion God manifested Himself. He jumped, soared, and roared as the stalwarts around Him strained every nerve and muscle of theirs to hold Him down. The Narasimha sent shivers into the crowd. Urchins trembled and mothers hid their children in their bosoms. The Man-Lion God had manifested Himself.

Undaunted Hiranya challenged Him, standing close; but finding that, that night, the Narasimha was getting into Avesa, some persons came over to Hiranya and took him to a safe distance. It was always feared that, if in full possession, the actor would really tear open Hiranya, forgetting that he was acting. So, from a distance, Hiranya began his songs abusing the Lord. But who helped him by singing with him? Everybody in the chorus looked at Nanu Bhagavatar but old Nanu was looking at somebody in the crowd, scratching his head and yawning. Somebody else helped Hiranya. Hari began his second song and again Nanu Bhagavatar turned to somebody in the audience and began to chat. As Hari finished his song, abusing Narasimha vehemently, Narasimha was not angry; he was immensely pleased with the art of Hari who rendered the role of God's enemy. But Hiranyasura was God's enemy in some bygone age; there was another who was God's enemy there at that time on whom the Lord turned His fury. Narasimha roared, turning to where Nanu Bhagavatar stood chatting: 'You, sinner, bane of the village art, you vile Nanu,' and tried to tear Himself from the dozen pairs of iron grips holding Him by the waist. Everybody stood astounded and in utter consternation, Nanu Bhagavatar turned towards the Man-Lion Avatar who, instead of acting to put down evil and protect good, had begun to do so really. But who was the evil that that year's Man-Lion put down? Not Hiranya. Unable to bear the rot that was setting in the art and the performances as a result of the bad behaviour of the jealous and irate Nanu, the Man-Lion Manifestation turned away from its enemy, Hiranya, and pounced upon Nanu, the real Asura.

'You, sinner, bane of the village and its art, vile Nanu,' roared the Man-Lion; and frightened, yet not fully realising how it was going to develop, Nanu Bhagavatar faced the Man-Lion. Terror-stricken, more men flew to hold Narasimha tighter. 'Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!' thundered Narasimha and with a leap, released Himself from the crowd about Him. Over the heads of the audience, scattered pell-mell by this time, old Nanu flew and Narasimha volleyed and thundered at his back. Everybody was too stupefied, too terror-stricken, to approach the Lord who had thought it necessary to descend in the person of devout Panchanadam. Old Nanu ran into the temple, entered each house, jumped over walls, shivering and dripping with

The sun was just rising wh. n the Man-Lion issued out of the well.

perspiration. Narasimha chased him as he flew along the fields. And as the first glimmer of dawn appeared, Nanu who had run and run for his life, came back to the temple-front and jumped into the well there. Before the thousands of horror-stricken eyes, looking wildly, screaming mouths, and uplifted hands, Narasimha sent a deafening peal and jumped into the well.

*

Who would dare to approach that well? Who could save him whom God wants? The sun was just rising when the Man-Lion issued out of the well, gasping, hands all red with blood and body garlanded with entrails. In one movement, He clasped in fondest embrace Hari, the Hiranya, and Prahlada. Devout women prostrated; others stood praying with their hearts. And in that still morning filled with reverential awe around, with Hari, the Hiranya, on one side and Prahlada on the other, the Man-Lion God roared the moral of the great passion play :—

'To save the good, to destroy the evil, to establish right on earth, I manifest Myself whenever necessary.

'When virtue wanes and vice waxes I manifest Myself.'

O FATHER—THY SON!

By M. N. SUBRAMANIAM

IT was Jubilee Day. The evening parade was just over. We were so exhausted that, instead of returning to our homes, we sauntered along the meadows. We looked for a quiet spot to beguile the hot summer evening.

Around us the road winded down-hill. The sun, now a red ball of fire, was half hidden behind the distant hillocks. Below us the little town was gorgeously illuminated to commemorate the silver jubilee of the accession of King George.

We—there were four of us—were humming low tunes when, from down the hill, came a shrill voice, chanting '*Ram*, *Ram*.' There was a divine timbre in the words. We sat erect, out of reverence for the great Rama, and our lips unconsciously uttered the sacred words. We looked in the direction of the sound. It grew louder and louder and at last a tall figure emerged on the road from below. As yet we could not fully make it out. We were expecting the arrival of some *bairagi*, but as the figure approached us, we were disappointed. It stopped suddenly, and turning round espied us. For a few minutes it gazed intently at us. Then it left the road, entered the footpath, and was soon before us.

The man was tall and majestic in appearance. His silvery beard covered nearly half of his chest. His moustache was trimmed and marked him a military man. He had an yellow pugree. A long black furcoat covered his whole body, down to the knees. He wore Punjabi pyjamas.

Travel had stamped his face with exhaustion. He was about fifty years old.

For some moments none of us spoke. We were so struck by the stranger's appearance that we did not venture a conversation with him.

'Can I have a night's shelter here?' the stranger was the first to speak.

'Surely yes, please sit down; you are tired,' I said.

'Tired, yes, I am; I had no food for the last two days.' There was sadness in his tone.

At this, Raghuvir Singh, who was all the while intently scrutinising the stranger, left us without a word.

The stranger sat down and eyed each of us in turn. We thought it unseemly to ask him who he was and where he was going. Soon Raghuvir Singh returned with food and a pitcher of water.

'Satisfy yourself, pray,' we said in a chorus.

He muttered '*Ram*, *Ram*,' thanked us for our generosity, and began to eat. The quickness with which he finished showed how hungry he was.

The repast over, his body was filled with a new vigour. There was a bright glow in his face. Again, he eyed each one of us in turn and said:—

'So to-day is Jubilee Day.'

We replied it was so. He sighed deeply. There was an awkward pause.

'You have served in the army?' I asked.

'The Army, yes,' his face assumed a pensive look. 'Yes, I was in the Army,' he continued, 'but now I am a wanderer.'

The sun had just set. A cool soft breeze blowed in our direction. The sky was pale blue. Nature was at her best that evening. We were immensely pleased with our surroundings.

'Excuse me.' Again, it was I that ventured to speak. 'We would be glad to know who you are. Only please don't consider me impertinent. Since you were in the Army, you should have been the witness of many acts of bravery, in some of which, I am sure, you yourself might have had a part.' I

noticed he was pleased. Obviously, he himself had the idea uppermost in his mind. I was encouraged. I continued: 'Nothing goads young warriors like us to action as the recitation of noble and heroic deeds, performed by men like you . . .'

He did not allow me to proceed. Opening his great coat, he took out many medals and ribbons, the rewards for his valour, and placed them before us. He removed his shirt and in the fading light showed us big scars on his chest and arms.

'These medals and these scars,' he said, 'you see them before you. Well, I have seen many battlefields.'

He looked up to us as if he wished to know whether we doubted his credentials. And then he resumed :—

'I have seen many battlefields. I could narrate many heroic deeds of brave men. Duty and humanity were the mainsprings of their lives. But I will tell you the story which I am never weary of repeating. I am the actor, the hero of that story, but it is a story not only of my bravery but of my confession also, yes . . . the story of my confession.' As he uttered the last few words he gave a very deep and painful sigh.

We drew closer to him.

'Your confession?' Raghuvir Singh asked.

'Yes, my confession. Don't anticipate, don't interrupt, listen.'

'My name is, . . . well, I will tell you that at the end.' We were surprised. Why did he hide his name?

'Well, I was in the —th Gurkha Regiment. It was the year 1911. The scene of action was Delhi, the Imperial Capital of many a dynasty that ruled this ancient land. It was the Durbar Day.'

'The Durbar Day!' Raghuvir could not control his surprise.

'Yes, it was the Durbar Day. His Imperial Majesty King George and his consort were at Delhi to hold the Durbar. The Royal procession was to pass through the principal streets to the amphitheatre where stood the big and gorgeous Durbar Pavilion.

'Imperial Delhi was never clothed, since the days of the Great Moghuls, with such splendour as on that day. Every one of the Indian Princes was there, to pay homage to their sovereign. Thousands and thousands of people, of all caste, colour, and creed, poured into Delhi the previous night to have a glimpse of their Emperor who had come all the way from distant England.

'Our regiment was posted to guard the route. The responsibility was very great. From early morning we had great difficulty in checking the rush.

'At last the hour for the procession to start was near. There was tense excitement among the mammoth crowd. Everyone awaited with bated breath, the passing of the Royal procession.

'Suddenly the sound of horses' hooves could be heard in the distance. A low murmur passed along the route. 'The King! the King! *Jai! Jai!* Victory to the King and Queen!'

'As the procession approached the place where I stood sentinel, wild cheers greeted the Royal couple.

'In a few minutes the procession had passed. The last horseman of the Life Guards was about to pass me when, through the morning stillness, I heard a painful shriek.

'I turned, the crowd yelled. Well, what do you think had happened?'

He could as well have asked us when the world came into existence. We were silent.

'Well, it is here that my bravery comes in . . . and my confession.

'When I turned, I perceived to my great dismay, a child just a year or two old walking straight into death under the horses' hooves.

'Duty or Humanity. The alternatives did not trouble me even for a second. With lightning speed I dashed under the horse, caught the child to my

breast, and gave such a terrific blow on the horse's flank that it lost its balance and fell with a heavy thud. Fortunately no one was wounded.

'The crowd heaved a sigh of relief. The action was sudden; it astounded even me, the hero of the drama.

'I peered into the child's eyes. Laughter swelled its ruddy cheeks. Its cool smile startled me. I turned round to the terror-stricken mother.

'From among the throng, a woman extended her shaking hands. It was she who gave the piercing cry. She had fainted meanwhile, and now as she approached me, her head almost dizzy, her eyes half-closed, I was startled. . .'

The stranger stopped suddenly. The sun had sunk down long ago. The moon had risen and was now playing fully on his face. His eyes were filled with tears. And as I turned aside to hide away the sympathetic tears that filled my eyes, I was startled, startled to see Raghuvir also in tears. His face was agitated.

'Why were you startled?' my voice broke the silence.

'Yes, I was startled,' the stranger's voice was trembling. 'The woman was my wife and that child was my son. . . and now the story of my confession—' he was overwhelmed, he could not speak.

Imagine our surprise when Raghuvir suddenly jumped up to the stranger and embraced him. 'Father! my dear father!' Raghuvir was crying. 'Oh, father!' He could not say more. The old man only asked, 'Can it be?'

Raghuvir replied, 'Yes, it is so, father, I am your son.'

They were lost in each other's arms.

It was some minutes bebore Raghuvir dragged himself away from his father. Our surprise did not worry him. He was running towards his quarters.

Shamshere Singh—that was Raghuvir's father's name—turned to us. His tearful eyes had pursued his son till he was lost to sight.

The story of his confession was easily told. He was a short-tempered man. A few months before Raghuvir was born, his wife, unable to bear his ill-treatment had sought shelter under her father's roof. Shamshere did not care for her. He was leading a wild life. The first glimpse of his child he had just when he saved it from the jaws of death. That was the story of his bravery. But he deserted his wife again. He returned to his wild life and then the Great War called him to the battle-fields of Flanders. All contacts with his wife ceased. When he returned from the War nobody could say anything about his wife or the child for which he had almost given his life.

Despair possessed him; he repented for his follies. For generations his family could boast of hardy fighters, and he knew his young son might have joined the Army. And so, this idea slowly taking deep root, for nearly twenty years he had wandered penniless, starving, in search of his darling son and virtuous wife.

When we reached Raghuvir's quarters, many eyes were peering through the doorway. There was jubilation in the whole sepoy colony.

A sumptuous feast was held that night in commemoration of the return of Shamshere Singh, the hero of many battles.

CONFESSION

By ILANGOVAN

I AM a great sinner. You may hate my life. 'Worse than a pig,' may be the contemptuous verdict of women. 'He is not a man; a beast,' some may declare. Call me what you like. Exhaust your vituperation. But one thing I beg of you. Show me mercy, pray for me. It is prayer I ask, nothing else.

*

A body moulded in golden light. The smile that danced on her coral lips showed that she was born to enslave man. The beauty of the universe whirled in her dark eyes. Her hair concealed and revealed her body like dark clouds gliding across the western sky. One experienced newer and newer emotions in her beautiful countenance.

My heart's gloom used to fade on her appearance. It was as if a lamp was lit inside me. No man can escape the intoxication of her magic voice.

Yes, she was divine. Only nine. Even at that early age she had within her the power to sway the world. Devanayaki, what a musical name!

Why was I not like her? Why does not the world respond to me as it does to her? The light of truth has fled from me. Falsehood and vengeance have conquered my mind. O! I shudder to think of it. Twelve years ago, how the world loved me! How many wallowed at my feet! How many rushed to satisfy my little desires! How many kissed me, embraced me! Where are they—all of them now? Why do they ignore me? Why? Oh why?

'Your beauty has been destroyed. Truth is no more in you. You are lifeless. You are ugly. Men hate you,' retorts the soul.

Horrible truth! Is it my soul speaking? No, no! It is the devil. Hark! again that voice. 'Fool! I am not the devil. The world always ignores my truthful advice. Your purity is stained. You tease me with your play-acting. Even now you might be like Devanayaki. Go, cleanse yourself! Mourn at the feet of God. Mourning will bring you solace and freedom.' Yes, it may be true—what the soul says. God! my head reels.

*

Evening. The temple-bells chimed rousing melodious echoes. Sitting in the dark and solemn corridor, I was drowned in empty dreams. God's presence! The sight of it lets loose a flood of delicious love.

They call it stone, mud, wood! Oh! When will they realise? I weep for those who have lost the incomparable joy of the universe.

'Uncle!' called a voice.

I turned. There was Devanayaki.

I smiled, devouring her divine beauty. She returned my gaze; laughed. Why did she laugh? What was the emotion that surged in her heart then? It is a secret still.

'Deva, why did you laugh?'

'Why? I don't know. Uncle, when will you get me sweeties?' she asked.

Her silk petticoat fluttered in waves in the cool wind. Oh, that terrible moment! Satan found it opportune to get to work.

A resounding laughter.

Who laughed? Not Devanayaki. Who else? I looked round. There was no one. I thought it was mere fancy.

'Deva, come here.'

I sat her on my lap.

She leaned on my chest, locked her hands behind my neck, and looked up at me. Her seductive pose made havoc of my mind. I caressed her arms.

'Show me mercy, pray for me. It is prayer I ask, nothing else.'

Her body flushed and a momentary thrill shot through that frail frame. My passion mounted.

'Deva, I shall get you sweeties. What will you give me?'

'Whatever you want, uncle. Yes, I will, really.'

'A kiss.'

A tinge of crimson flashed in her dimples. With rapid response she showered me with kisses on my lips. My heart missed a beat. I realised myself; cursed myself. A child, innocent of lust, the spark of chastity. . . .

I writhed within me at my meanness.

The world can never punish a man more severely than his own commiseration.

I trembled to hear the resounding laugh again.

'Look! How you are debasing yourself day by day. She is a child—untainted. You are not fit even to touch her. What is her plane, and yours? She is the Mother! You are a mere creature. Virtue stands aghast at your deed. Illusion dances in glee. How can the world tolerate you? Only self-deceivers believe in you. Real men hate you.' So reproached the soul.

Man—If you know him you realise God. He who fails to know himself and his neighbour—how could he recognise that invisible power? Darkness envelopes the universe. The sage conquers the emotions. He is the life-force of the scheme of things. Others are trash; useless burden on earth. Contemptible worms . . . .

The night passed amid such thoughts.

*

The dawn was breaking. I was rolling in the bed, reluctant to get up.

I felt a soft hand falling on me.

'Who is it?' I asked with closed eyes.

'It is I, uncle,' announced Devanayaki, embracing me.

Ah! I plunged into an ocean of joy. How could I know that this was only a curtain hiding misery?

The next moment something shot through inside me. I hugged Devanayaki and kissed her lips. She lost consciousness. I had lost my head. My last fall . . . .

Poets paint worthless fancies with beautiful words. They sway the minds of fools. They murder nature by their warped creations.

Humanity is struggling to get free from the fetters of fancy. Only one emotion rules the minds of artists. It is lust! Love? I talk of ethics. To think of myself under the basest of passions; the deepest pit I had tottered into, oh!

Life without divine blessing is not worth living.

Women! The spoilers of men. Their speech sheds sweetness while their mind foams with poison.

What right have I to blame them? Man accusing man—what folly! It is like finding fault with God. Women, the slaves of men! What absolute rot! It is men who are the slaves. They have lost their manliness. They increase their tribe in the world . . .

*

That afternoon. She was playing with a group of children. I looked at her face. She caught my look. There was no smile on her lips. Outraged horror and sorrow were seething in her.

The sight pierced my heart. I felt myself a murderer. I dreaded to look at her again. The criminal fears his own shadow. He is a coward.

'Look at him, there! He is very wicked. Come on, let us run away,' shouted Devanayaki to her playmates, pointing to me.

Her words singed my heart like angry tongues of flame. Disgrace and forced conceit enveloped me. Alas, how dearly did she love me! What unbound.

ed affection! I had poisoned the entire flow of her affection with the burning touch of lust.

I let myself drift the whole day. Fate.? Peace was not to be!

The world will never forgive my crime. I do not expect even a faint show of pity. But He can forgive me. He, the Ocean of Love.

'Wherefore the fretting? What is the wrong after all? Devanayaki is a girl. She too has the same feelings within her. Your action is not strange to the world,' spoke a voice.

'It is illusion. *Maya* speaking. Beware,' admonished my soul.

'You cannot get out of my control. You are mine. I can crush you in no time,' roared *Maya* again.

*

She was bedridden. For six long days. Devanayaki lay suffering. Her parents looked at me with horror. Her brother welcomed me.

She ... a recumbent statue of gold! Her eyes were lustreless. Her lips were cracked. Her face was pale, lifeless. I stood rooted to the spot for a moment.

She opened her eyes. 'Uncle, did you get the sweeties for me?' she asked faintly. I extended the edibles I had brought.

The next moment our eyes met in a steady gaze. Her look penetrated my innermost depths. I shivered.

'Uncle? Oh . . . he is wicked . . . cruel . . . he is not my uncle . . . ' she shouted. That was all. Her slender body convulsed with pain.

She was unconscious. For half an hour she fought with death. The convulsion ceased. The look brightened. There was no anger in the eyes. They were calm. She had reached the end of the journey.

I leaned forward.

'Devanayaki!'

There was no reply.

'She has gone!' her mother burst into sudden wailing.

Yes; she was no more. Only the body—*Maya's* reflection—remained.

I broke down.

*

I am a murderer. I have killed her. Tomorrow I will be punished in the presence of the Almighty. I am ready for it.

There I shall fall at the feet of Devanayaki and beg her to forgive me.

Lust rules the world. This day and age together fan the flame of lust Passion is mighty. Conquer it; you will realise Divine Love.

Farewell. . . I beseech you again . . . Pray for me.

Translated from the TAMIL by P. G. Sundararajan

POOR BRAHMA

By A. RAMIAH

BRAHMA, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver, and Siva, the destroyer form the essence of Hindu theism; they form the Hindu Trinity. A fascinating division of labour! Brahma leads; for, if he does not supply men and materials what will the second preserve and the third destroy? But who cares for poor Brahma? The sectarian Vaishnavite belittles him with the legend that Brahma is but Vishnu's son, born of his navel-lotus and the more vehement Saivite sectarian scoffs at him with the story that Siva plucked off one of the heads of naughty Brahma, and that his child-son, Subrahmanya, gave a clout on his head and threw him into prison. Poor Brahma has no sectarian follower with equal enthusiasm. The holy Brahma, engaged in the noblest work of keeping this Hindu nation of ours from death like the Greek and the Roman, is cruelly neglected by us. Ungrateful Hindu! you worship the sun, moon, and stars, nay snakes and trees but not your father, the father of all this universe, Brahma, the creator. How many of their towering temples did the Chalukya monarchs, the Hoysala kings, and the Imperial Cholas dedicate to poor Brahma? The archaeological expert may point out that in the heart of some forest, on the top of some inaccessible mountain, there is a dilapidated temple with a broken Brahma. But an honest Hindu cannot say there is any known great temple in honour of poor Brahma.

And to-day, especially, there is a great menace to the noble work of creation which he is doing. Sitting on his lotus in his Satyaloka, did Brahma ever dream that terrible enemies would be born in Kali to blast the work which is his very nature and character,—enemies like Malthus, Marie Stopes, and among ourselves, ex-judges, and ex-executive council members? Has he got incarnations, manifold manifestations, exploits, victories like his two luckier compeers? No. If Brahma were allowed by our Puranas to take Avatars, surely he would descend first on the Edward Elliot's Road and break swords with the two knights there that lead the local campaign to stop Brahma's noble job of creation. It is a consoling rumour that Father Basenach, the stout Catholic, has sent a petition to Brahma to take such an Avatar at once.

Poor Brahma is assigned to what is called the Satyaloka, the World of Truth, which again nobody favours now. And his wife—Sarasvati, the Goddess of Learning? She is responsible for the learning which ends in unemployment, discontent, and sedition; and as the muse with the lute on her lap, she is also responsible for making every nook of city, town, and village scream with H.M.V., Columbia, Odeon, Broadcast, Tas-o-phone etc., etc.

Each of our gods has his own vehicle, the *vahana*. Poor Brahma is said to ride a swan, a bird which I am told, I can be certain of not seeing even in the aviary of our zoos. But talking of the vehicle of Brahma and Sarasvati, the swan, an idea strikes me. It is because of this, I think, manufacturers invented the Swan Fountainpen to commit our muse to paper!

And Brahma's son, he has many; why, all of us are his sons; but the most famous is Narada, a musician-cum-walking newspaper. He is Puck, he is Punch, he is Low. He is always on his foot, the holder of the world's title for non-stop walking. I met him the other day but I never expected he would convert me and make me write this plea for poor Brahma. He made me Brahma-minded! I am a Brahma-sectarian now, but, poor me, how I forgot to ask Narada what caste-mark I should wear as a Brahma-sectarian!

CRAVEN

By U. S. RAMACHANDRAN

IN the gathering twilight of a summer evening, Ramu and Seeta sat looking vacantly at the river which was lisping before them. The cow-bells and the temple-bells cast a dreamy spell over all things. For a time the child that lingered wistfully in them remembered its past. They talked of many things—their childhood's joys, their old winter evenings when they sat listening to their mother's stories. In the recollection of happy childhood, there was a sense of comfort, of exaltation.

'Where is Padma, Seeta, you know our neighbour's little girl?' asked Ramu, dreamily.

'Hers is a sad story. She was married even when she was seven. Poor thing, she lost her husband the same year, a few months after her marriage.'

'She must be quite eighteen now. Is she married again?'

'What is it you are talking, Ramu? I tell you she is a widow and you know we are all Hindus and Brahmins!'

'Oh, Hindus—Brahmins be blowed! It is an absolute tyranny. For no fault of your own, is she to be doomed to eternal hell? She must remarry.'

'Must? Ramu, you forget you are not a dictator! Who will marry her now? Of course she is well educated and fair; but she is a widow, and you know what that means.'

All the world before them looked so peaceful and content. Why should there be so much injustice and cruelty among men alone? Ramu felt the tryranny of it all keenly.

'Anyone will marry Padma—anyone with a sense of honour and justice. It is a crime, a heinous crime. . . .'

For a moment Seeta's eyes rested on Ramu. They were deep and calm like forest lakes. She said calmly, 'Ramu, you are yet a student. The world is not what you imagine it to be from your college-tower. People will talk from platforms with heart-moving vehemence. No one will come forward to marry Padma—and—she is doomed for life. That's our Religion, our Dharma!'

He thought there was a slight tremor in her voice. But outwardly she was quite composed. She turned away her face slowly, sadly, and gazed into the dimness of the closing night. She was changed, changed beyond all his knowledge. There was a strong feeling in him that she was being unkind to the other sex.

'No, Seeta, there are some men who are noble and pure-minded who will willingly love and marry her.'

She swung round sharply. 'Now Ramu, you are not on the platform of your College Union where you pass resolutions which you never execute. To be quite serious, will you be noble and just to a poor widow in such a position? Will you break the bonds of your customs, your family, your community when the call of duty is on you?'

It was a Seeta he had never seen. From the quiet sister, half reflective, half wistful he knew, she had become a prophetic Sybil. But he was not to be scared. He said assertively, 'Seeta, when the call comes, I shan't be a coward.'

Seeta said nothing. She only stared deep into his eyes, as if to see whether he would prove as good as his word. He felt the absurdity of each looking hard at the other. He laughed, but the laugh somehow rang forced and hollow even in his ears. Seeta said in a subdued tone, 'Well, Ramu, you will do your duty when the day comes.'

Just then their mother wanted them both.

II

It was purely an accidental meeting. Ramu was not aware Seeta had a visitor. He entered her room thinking she was all alone. He began to beat a hasty retreat when he saw she had a friend. But Seeta asked him in, and introduced him to Padma. How she had shot up! She was no longer the little romping girl he knew, bubbling over with laughter and mischief. She was a blooming young woman, very beautiful. But she had a pensive, almost mournful look.

He was feeling a bit embarrassed in Padma's presence. He did not know what to say to her, and for a while he was silent. But Seeta soon broke this heavy, awkward silence.

'You know, Padma, Ramu is home for the holidays and his presence must not at all interfere with your visits. You should be free as before. You will find Ramu quite a hero for a few days; he will tell us delightful things about the little world he has just left behind, won't you, Ramu?'

Ramu gave a shy little laugh, and Padma, risking a covert glance at him, also laughed. They got on swimmingly into conversation with each other. With the light-hearted versatility of a true collegian, he hopped like a bird from topic to topic; he was not a little astonished to find Padma quite as lively and well-informed as ever. Sweetness, song, and wit hung like morning dews on her lips.

Days slid away in the happy indolence of home. Padma was a member of their family. Her father was a rich pensioner and was deeply immersed in religious pursuit, befitting his age. Padma had lost her mother and was very much left to herself. She, however, found blessedness and love spread like a fragrance in Seeta's home.

The full moon was rising in memorable pomp. And the river lay laughing at a distance. Seeta and Padma were sitting on the open terrace, looking silently into it. Ramu felt their silence oppressive.

'Seeta, sometimes, I feel there is so much of injustice in this world. Don't you think so?'

'Yes, there is. Why don't you be a hero and right the wrong?'

'Don't be sarcastic, Seeta,' continued Ramu absent-mindedly, 'What I mean is, there is so much of injustice and cruelty among men, among us. Now here is our Padma . . .'

Padma's face clouded over. Ramu realised he had unnecessarily raised up a ghost. The words had escaped him quite unconsciously.

Seeta turned on Ramu a mute reproach. But just then a voice calling her she hopped down the grim, half-lit stairs. Ramu did not speak. Padma was looking away. After a few minutes, during which time he was wondering what an unconscionable time Seeta was gone, Ramu turned round—to see Padma winking over big hot tears. He moved his chair closer to her, guiltily and confusedly.

'Padma, have I hurt you? I let myself forget.'

Padma quickly dried her eyes. 'Oh, no. My eyes are somewhat smarting.'

But he knew it was the smarting of the heart. 'Padma, excuse me. I am extremely grieved, but it is an injustice. Why don't you marry again?'

She looked up for an instant. Her face was so sweet a charity!

'No Ramu, I don't want to. I want to live out my little life in loneliness and die without bringing misery to others.'

'Misery! you mean bliss? Why, if you give the word, not one, a thousand will rush forward. Padma, you shouldn't waste away in neglect. It is a sin, it is a . . .'

'Pray, say no more about it. Of course, there may be many coming forward now to be a hero for an hour, and out of some pure sympathy, no doubt. But they will repent their action ever after, with the world against them . . . I shan't make others miserable.'

Padma felt like crying: her heart was melting in sweet fatigue. Ramu

came up close to her and stood by her side, and looked at her face and at her trembling hands.

'Padma, you are wrong. Many will love you. A word from you. . . . there are . . . Padma . . . you know . . . for a long time, I wanted to tell you. . . .'

Padma too had risen up. They were facing each other, her hands clasped in Ramu's. Their breaths mingled in the night air. Their soothing whispers floated in the silent atmosphere. Padma's eyes became narrower, a faint blush leapt to her cheeks. And a smile beamed on her full lips. Ramu would feed his famished lips on hers. But Seeta, coming up suddenly, clouded the clear holiday of their hearts. Padma hastily freed her hands and stood apart, fingering her sari. Ramu was looking guilty and sheepish.

'I am afraid I'm disturbing your pleasant tete-a-tete,' said Seeta smiling.

'Oh, no, . . we just. . .' was all that Ramu could mumble.

III

Two years moved on slowly, calmly, monotonously. Ramu was back again in his family circle. The last time he was at home, he was but a student, but now he was employed, and on a month's leave.

In his own room Ramu was steept in the very wildest of wild-cat dreams.

Seeta rushed in panting. 'Is it true? Is it true, Ramu?'

Ramu was at a loss to know what she meant. 'Is what true,' he asked her, after a moment's pause.

Seeta was tremendously excited and flushed. Her bosom was heaving rapidly.

'Why, Ramu, your marriage? Is it a fact that father has called you over here for marriage. . . is it. . .'

'Yes,' said Ramu calmly.

'Ramu, it can't be. It must not be. Remember the other day when we were talking about Padma. You promised then you would do your duty when the time came. Is it not?'

Seeta had composed herself and spoke quietly. Somehow he felt a bit uneasy. There was an unusual seriousness on her face. It seemed quite unfair to hold one to what he babbled as a student in his careless youth, in the heat of the moment. But he had no desire to slash back now.

'Well, Seeta, what is my duty now?'

Seeta shot a sharp glance at him.

'Do you ask me what your duty is? All I can answer is I am ashamed of you. After all your education is nothing.'

Seeta half turned to go away. It was a bitter moment for Ramu, but he subdued himself and asked her somewhat coldly, 'What is the matter, Seeta? Why are you so upset?'

She turned back. 'Look here, Ramu, don't pretend ingnorance. You know perfectly what I mean. Didn't you encourage the other day Padma into forgetting herself? Didn't you encourage her into believing that you will marry her? Don't you think it a gross injustice to trifle with her feelings and to leave her now in the lurch.'

Ramu felt very uncomfortable. He knew the storm was gathering over his head. But he had not a word to answer. His heart had fluttered more than once in an anguish of self-reproach for all his mawkishness and vehemence of feelings the other evening. Of course when it was a personal thing, it was different. He felt the absurdity of it. In fact he had the greatest sympathy for Padma and saw it was an injustice to let her waste herself away for life. And yet . . . somehow he wanted to end this unpleasant interview.

'No, Seeta, I didn't enconrage her. You know it is all foolish, quite absurd . . . there is my father, my mother, then the whole world . . . it is inherently impossible. . . .'

'What is absurd, Ramu ? And what is impossible ? '

'Why, I mean this about marrying Padma. She is a widow . . . think of our father and our mother . . . what will they say . . . and then the whole world, will it allow ? Well, it is all impossible, Seeta . . . it was all a student's vehemence, misplaced enthusiasm. . . '

'Then Ramu, you are simply one amongst those selfish backboneless men. You gave her hopes and now you blast them. What a shame ! '

She immediately left the scene.

IV

Ramu was feeling far from being relieved. All at once, the room became very stuffy. He stept out into the balcony. The coolness and the moonlight embraced him. The shadows flitted like dead snakes in the moonlight among the trees. The river's peaceful voice came on to him like a lullaby through the quiet air.

For hours together he stood. Alone with the moonlight and the wakeful river, he tried to dream out his oppressive thoughts. But even in the still and composed atmosphere there was an indefinable restlessness. Again and again, he asked himself, 'Does Padma know ? How does she take it ? '

It was past midnight. He tried hard to banish these thoughts. The whole world slept peacefully. But he could not. He was gazing wistfully into the coldly moonlit landscape. Suddenly a meagre figure tripped past the darkness of the trees. Just then the rolling clouds hid the face of the moon and cut off her rays from the unsuspecting world. Perhaps, an erring soul, conveniently veiled from the eyes of the curious by a generous moon.

Several long seconds went by. Ramu's heart contracted nervously, and gloomy and pale, his teeth set together, he stood there, staring motionlessly into the trees. All on a sudden, there was a dull thud, a distant splash. . .

His heart stopped within him. From the moving river came a-floating in the air a moan, a deep loud moan, resembling a wail. He waited anxiously. Nothing followed. Perhaps the same erring soul sobbing itself out secretly to the sympathetic river. Perhaps, a water-bird struggling on the river with an intruder. Perhaps a disturbed night-owl screeching disapprovingly. But that wail, so human, sank into his soul.

V

They stood staring at each other without a word. The morning chirp of brids, the loud street-cries, the hooting of the motor horns in the distance produced a complete babel.

At last Seeta heaved a sigh—it was like a faint, far echo. It went to his heart.

'Do you know, Ramu ?' her voice quivered a little.

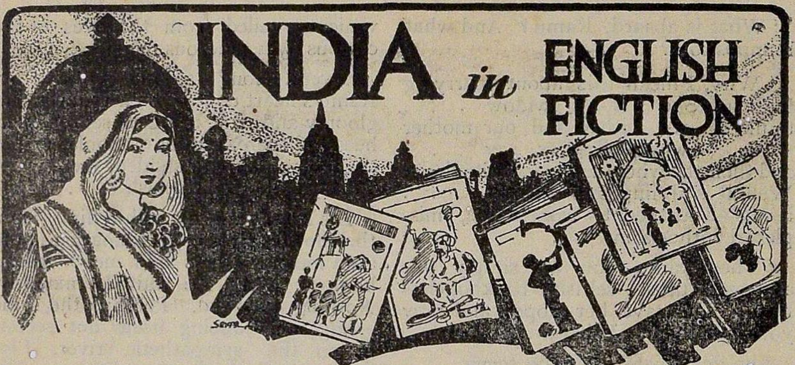
'Yes,' said Ramu, gently, almost inaudibly.

'Don't you think you are guilty ?'

There was no reproof in her voice, no rancour, no disgust Her placid depths seemed to reveal themselves serenely.

Ramu stood silent. His lips were parched. His head reeled. His eyes grew dim.

And soon the room faded away, and blackness came mercifully.



INDIA *in* ENGLISH FICTION

> *'India is a country where tradition is strong and authority, at any rate among the men of the older generation, is still profoundly respected. Similar causes produce similar effects, and one can find in India to-day the kind of scholarship that flourished in Europe up to the end of the seventeenth century, together with a complementary scholar-respecting public opinion.'—*
>
> *ALDOUS HUXLEY*

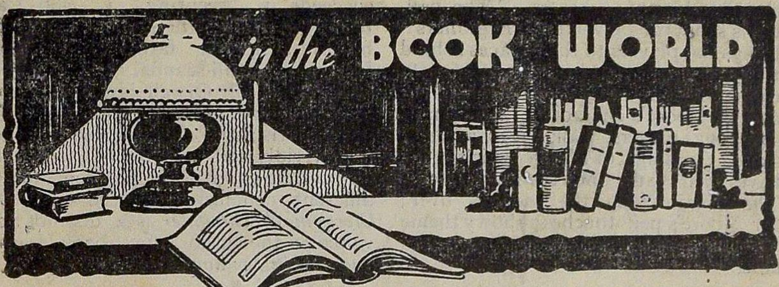
INDIANS who have chosen English as their medium of expression have, in recent times, learnt to exercise greater control over "form"; *The Gong of Shiva** by Dewan Sharar is one among the few books in which this control could be said to be almost perfect. It is a story planned, worked piece by piece, and realised as a whole in the mind; except that its dress is English, it is purely Indian.

Kamini, daughter of Shivram Das, a rich banker, is given in marriage to Ram Nath, son of Dawark Nath. She however, loves Brij Lal, a candidate for the Indian Civil Service and is loved by him in return. Her marriage proves a tragedy. Ram Nath ill-treats her, and Kamini's brother, Subh, who is enraged at seeing such ill-treatment assaults Ram Nath, throws him down the temple steps one day and breaks his neck. He is brought to trial and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Subh loves Shanta, daughter of Roop Vathi, a poor Brahmin widow, but Shanta is given away in marriage to Kali Charan. A few years pass; Kali Charan dies and Shanta is left a widow. Kamini, who, in the meantime, has also become a widow, joins Brij Lal. Subh, too, likes to start life with Shanta as his wife but brahmin orthodoxy stands in the way and to Shanta who loves Subh, re-marriage is something repugnant.

There is nothing heavy, nothing unreal in *The Gong of Shiva*; the plot moves without a hitch and the incidents are so manipulated as to *create* characters. Mr Sharar is such a natural writer that words flow brightly and without effort from his pen; in dialogue as in description, *e.g.*, the trial scene, the mastery is the same. He is never given to introspecting; his characters think and talk clearly, they are not *made* to talk. The novel, though sad is never oppressing; it has delicate touches of humour and there is lambency for every little gloom.

AN INDO-ANGLIAN

* Harrap, 7*s*. 6*d*.



ENGLISH

The Apple of Concord, by Richard Church (Dent, *7s. 6d.*)

Overture, Beginners! by John C. Moore (Dent *7s. 6d.*)

A Clergyman's Daughter, by George Orwell (Gollancz, *7s. 6d.*)

Dip, Lizzie, Dip, & Other Stories, by Josephine Blumenfield (Heinemann, *7s. 6d.*)

THE scene of *The Apple of Concord* is laid in Paris and the French countryside, 'that Canal country where Corot painted and where Delius lived and composed.' Into this world comes Gregory Wade, an Englishman who has been divorced by his wife, as Secretary to Mr Fletcher, a wealthy, eccentric American. Wade, in his broken and disillusioned state, wonders what quality it was in him that made the American engage his services; surely it 'consisted in an ability to raise false hopes in other people; hopes that he seemed fated never to fulfil. Why was that? Because the world was awry; because he had returned to a peace-time world whose shape and gravitation were changed.' Yes, it was to a peace-time world that he had escaped; and here he lives to be healed by the influence of three women. Two of them, Josephine and Miriam, are the daughters of the American to whom he is secretary; the third is Antoinette de Vaudrac of the de Vaudrac family to which he was introduced on his arrival in France. Josephine is beautiful and a pagan; Miriam, the younger sister, is more tender-hearted than Josephine and more intelligent; but it is the little French-woman who has the capacity to heal the spiritually sick Gregory. 'Her large brown eyes were apparently a family trait, but Antoinette's spirit had experimented further with the tradition, and this was the result; an individuality that made the casual observer overlook every other feature in the girl. One hardly heard her speak, for her charming, broken, and husky voice offered only an accompaniment to the fuller and more subtle eloquence of her eyes. . . Those quick, eloquent eyes, the sensitive nostrils, and the mouth alive with humour; the whole figure from head to foot expressive of good taste, originality, and dignity! Yes, how did she combine that unassailable dignity with such a generous freedom? It was miraculous.' Yes, it is a miracle, so poetically wrought by Mr Church that brings sun and harmony to the life of Gregory Wade, and though we don't grudge him these, the sympathy of the author for this character, it must be said, is rather exuberantly given, and this exuberance the reader is not willing to share. But a strange new note is struck in *The Apple of Concord*; a strange new ground is explored in it by the author of *The Prodigal Father*.

A novel about the theatre is ever refreshing; *Overture Beginners!* which is one, and in which 'all the characters are imaginary except one',

has the rush and brilliancy of life associated with a theatre. 'The call-boy's shout of 'Overture, Beginners!' brings the players to their places behind the curtain; but it has deeper significance than that.' The curtain goes up, and Mr Moore's characters, a dozen or so young players, walk on to a wider stage, the stage of life in which 'they have their exits and their entrances.' The curtain falls, the scene is over; Mr Moore's pen touches a showy theme with a light we don't expect would fade.

From the theatre to the pulpit is indeed an interesting jump. Dorothy Hare, daughter of a Rector does the work of the parish and keeps house for her father; the father is dreamy and unworldly, and when his domestic affairs reach a climax, he having refused to pay his creditors, Dorothy breaks down, loses her memory, and leaves home in the night. She is robbed of her clothes and is caught in the eddies of London night-life: when she regains her memory she finds that her running away has been made out as a nasty elopement, and her father throws her out. Cast off thus, she succeeds in securing a job as teacher in a private school; she ends by running her father's parish and home, free of all scandal of the alleged elopement. Mr Orwell is at his best in the descriptive portions; Dorothy's life in the parish and as a vagrant is done both vividly and realistically; though an austere artistic code demands a different conclusion to the story, *A Clergyman's Daughter* is a distinct advance on the author's first book, *Down and Out in London and Paris.*

Judged from the technical standard, the stories in *Dip, Lizzie, Dip* are a brilliant success; they are done, as it were, by a sleight of hand. In some of them one distinct point is clearly made, in others cleverly; but in all of them an exacting reader finds something lacking, like a link broken out of a chain; it is deliberately withheld. The stories have surface glitter as well as the soundness of reality; Miss Blumenfield is at once an entertainer and a keen examiner of human emotions.

PEREGRINE PICKLE

THE SHORT STORY

INDEX TO VOLUME I

(August 1934, to July 1935)

[*NOTE: In the two sections the titles in italics relate to short stories and to books reviewed*]

SECTION I

A

PAGE

ABE.
Love is Best 99

Anjaneyalu, A.
All for a Flower 158

Aundy.
Breaking the Rod 141
Her Happiness 249
Daughter India 308
The Hindu Widow 436
Her Hindu Mother 508

B

Bhaskaran, N. V.
In God's Own Sanctuary 505

Brayshaw, Eileen Ruth.
In Alien Land 415

C

Chalapathi Rau, M.
The Haunted Village 10
Crowded Hours 128
Room No. 13 173
At the Kutb 338
Death of Midas 531

D

Devasahayam, Cross S.
Deception 109

G

Gopal Rao, M.
Enlistment 64
The Casket of Doom 190
The Uninvited 271
The Axe 421

Guruswami Reddiar, Krishna R.
The Sole Difference 25
Renunciation 47

I

PAGE

Ilangovan.
Confession 559

Isvaran, Manjeri S.
(" Raconteur" ; " E")
The Last Pawn 17
Uncandled Lives 53
The War Memorial 103
Justice 135
Jowramma 180
Seashells 265
Overwrought 295
In Mufti 355
Merry-go-round 406
Beginnings 433
The Cradle 484
The Kolu 537

J

Janardanam, T. G.
Languors of Virtue 200

K

Kadamby, Mannar
The Gamble 149
Love and the Leopard 187
Broken Faith 299
When the Gods Revenge 345
So False as Truth 393
The Mask 468

Kappana, K. M.
Junior Blast & Senior Blast 488

K., M. S.
The Awakening 268

M

Meenakshisundaram, C. D.
A Practical Joke 232

N

Nanjanath, G.
The Eye of the Idol 107

PAGE

Narayana.
Just For A Holiday 19
Nataraja Sarma, P. S. ("Stortler")
A Ray of Sunshine 32
Starved 69
Revelation 94
The End of a Feud 137
Navagar.
Atonement 255
Kudumi di! 386
The Passion Play 549
Nilakantan, M. G.
The Pity of It 500

P

Parasuraman, M. A.
She Kept Faith 26
Perumal, Nilkan A.
A Noble Mistress 89
Ponratnam, Schwartz.
Illusion 78
The Living Death 161
Injustice 275
Unmasked 326
Prabhakar.
One Never Knows 519

R

Rajagopalan, S.
Coffee & Kola 153
The Change 193
Minion of the Moon 288
Ramabhadran, N.
Raghu, Infalliable Palmist 316
Ramachandran, U. S.
Craven 564
Ramakrishnan.
Only A Dreamer 60
Ramamritam, L. S.
Bapuji 363
Ambition Pays 461
Ramiah, A.
She 283
Flowers & Crotons 360
Pre-War Schoolmasters 412
Poor Brahma 563
Ranganathan, T. J.
The Miracle 370
The Cobbler's Crime 494

PAGE

Saksena, Rajendra Prasad.
The Extinguished Candle 319
Draupadi's Sari 375
Sarma, S. P.
The Wisdom of a Lie 112
Somayajulu, M. G.
Venkadu, the Harijan 322
Subramaniam, M. N.
O Father—Thy Son! 556
Sundaram, M. R. M.
The Dollmaker 75
Fantasy 154
The Bowl of Night 281
Bliss Regained 304
Stranded Souls 399
Thoughts and Dreams 443
Sundararajan, P. G.
And Man Fulfils Himself 447
Beauty is Truth 541

V

Venkataramani, K. S.
A Fractured Arm 4

SECTION II

i. INDO-ENGLISH

Chaff and Grain 241
S.V.V.
Cobbler and Other Stories, The,
M. Fattulla Khan 331
Creatures All,
Shankar Ram 123

G

Gong of Shiva, The,
Dewan Sharar 568

I

Idiot's Wife, The,
Dr Nareshchander Sen Gupta 123

K

Kandan, the Patriot
K. S. Venkataramani 38
Kettle Drums,
N. Ramabhadran 39

PAGE

M

More Soap Bubbles,
S. V. V. 241

R

Rose Clarendon ; or, the Trials of True Love,
A Young Indian Author 82

S

Soap Bubbles,
S. V. V. 241

Spotted Green,
Schwartz Ponratnam 167

Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction,
Bhupal Singh 287

U

Untouchable,
Mulk Raj Anand 521

ii. ENGLISH

A

Apple of Concord, The,
Richard Church 569

Autobiography,
J. C. Powys 247

B

Banquet, The,
R. H. Mottram 287

Best Short Stories, 1934 : *English and American, The,*
Edward J. O'Brien 214

Bombay Mail, The,
Lawrence J. Blochman 82

C

Cactus Land, The,
Denis Kincaid 80

Cat Jumps,
Elizabeth Bowen 82

Clergyman's Daughter, A,
George Orwell 569

Confessions of a Thug, The,
Meadows Taylor 164

Country House, The,
John Galsworthy 523

D

Dark Island, The,
V. Sackville-West 241

Darkening Green, The,
Compton Mackenzie 82

PAGE

Deadman's House,
Halcott Glover 379

Defy the Foul Fiend,
John Collier 82

Delay in the Sun,
Anthony Thorne 475

Demon in the House, The,
Angela Thirkell 287

Dip, Lizzie, Dip & Other Stories,
Josephine Blumenfield 569

Distant Drums,
R. J. Minney 473

Doctor Martinio & Other Stories,
William Faulkner 242

Doomington Wanderer, The,
Louis Golding 242

Doubtful Joy,
Elizabeth Jenkins 523

E

Eye of Bali, The,
Eileen Ruth Brayshaw 427

F

Fiddler of Lourdes & Other Vagabond Tales,
John Gibbons 40

H

Hands of Man, The,
Miss Margaret Williams 379

Harsh Voice, The,
Rebecca West 379

Hell! Said the Duchess,
Michael Arlen 167

Heron,
Romilly Cavan 167

Honeymoon & Other Stories,
Malachi Whitaker 167

Huge Shipwreck, The,
Kathleen Freeman 241

I

Island of Refuge,
John Fisher 287

It Was the Nightingale,
Ford Madox Ford 43

J

Jasmine Farm, The,
The Author of "Elizabeth and Her German Garden" 287

PAGE

L

Last Enchantment, The,
G. K. Chettur 45
Life of Katherine Mansfield, The,
R. E. Mantz and J. Middleton Murry 45
Life of Sir Henry Royce, The,
Sir Max Pemberton 171
Lives of a Bengal Lancer, The,
Major F. Yeats-Brown 425
Looking Back,
Norman Douglas 86
Lonely Lady of Dulwich, The,
Maurice Baring 124

M

Men Never Know,
Vicki Baum 475
Mr Issacs,
Francis Marion Crawford 121
More Pricks than Kicks,
Samuel Beckett 124
My Cousin: F. Marion Crawford,
Mrs Maude Howe Elliott 293
My life,
Annie S. Swan 127

O

Ordeal of Richard Feverel, The,
George Meredith 523
Overture, Beginners !,
John C. Moore 569

P

Paradise for Sale,
Sir Philip Gibbs 124
Pelican Walking,
G. B. Stern 82
Poacher, The,
H. E. Bates 427
Poe, Edgar Allan,
Dame Una Pope-Hennessey 384
Princess Brinda,
Maurice Dekobra 285
Private Life of Sherlock Holmes, The,
Vincent Starrett 87

R

Ranji,
Roland Wild 87
Recollections of Sir Henry Dickens, K. C., The, 44
Rhapsody in Gold,
Diana Maugham 523
Right-ho, Jeeves !,
P. G. Wodehouse 241

PAGE

Rosy-Fingered Dawn,
Rose Marie Hodgson 167

S

Sailor Town,
Paul Hervey Fox 331
Sentimental Journey, The,
Hugh Kingsmill 431
Seven Gothick Tales,
Isak Dinesen 167
Short Stories,
Guy de Maupassant 287
Silver Collar Boy,
Constance Wright 331
Six and Seven,
Lorna Rea 379
So A Poor Ghost,
Edward Thompson 36
Spin A Yarn, Sailor,
" Sinbad " 124
Stories, Essays, and Poems,
G. K. Chesterton 523
Street of Shadows, The,
Elizabeth Coxhead 331
Surgeon's Daughter, The,
Sir Walter Scott 235
Susan and Joanna,
Elizabeth Cambridge 475

T

Thing of Nought, A,
Hilda Vaughan 427
Time Machine and The Wheels of Chance, The,
H. G. Wells 523
Tom Tiddler's Ground,
Edward Shanks 124
Turn of the Screw and the Aspern Papers, The,
Henry James 523

W

We Have Come To A Country,
Lettice Cooper 475
White Peacock, The,
D. H. Lawrence 523
Who Once Eats out of the Tin Bowl,
Hans Fallada 427
Woman Who Had Imagination, The,
H. E. Bates 39

Y

Young Man in a Hurry, & Other Stories, A,
T. O. Beachcroft 82

THE END